

SEARCH AND RESCUE HELICOPTER REPLACEMENT
PROGRAM—SUITABILITY AND SAFETY
OF REPLACEMENT UNITS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau: Honourable senators, as a member of cabinet, the minister must also be aware of the safety concerns regarding some of the limitations of this equipment that her government is preparing to purchase. The majority of a shipboard helicopter's flying time occurs over open water. The Sea Hawk has been proven to be unable to stay afloat in the water for three minutes after shut-down. Given these limitations, can the minister confirm that her government has actually minimized that requirement for the new purchase — in other words, downgraded it from essential to desirable to fit the Sea Hawk's limitation? Also, are she and her colleagues in cabinet actually willing to put the lives of our armed forces at risk by purchasing unsafe equipment in order to strike a good deal and to get the submarines?

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, to my honourable friend, the answer to the latter part of his question is, "definitely not." Obviously, it is the position of the government that it will be making these purchases with exactly the opposite in mind — that is, to ensure the safety of the people who operate the helicopters and, as well, the best possible results for those who have need of them.

I am a little puzzled by my honourable colleague's comments in that it has been my understanding that the competition for this purchase will be open to any bidder who can meet the specifications required. However, I will check to see if there has been any change. I know that interest in this subject has been expressed in the media but, as far as I am aware, the situation has not changed.

Finally, I would like to express, I am sure, on behalf of everyone in this chamber, very hearty and heart-felt congratulations to the crew of the helicopter and indeed the crew of *HMCS Calgary*, which I had the distinct honour of commissioning last June, for a very successful mission. They have done a splendid job. It is quite uplifting to see the speed and the tenacity with which they handled what could have been an extremely tragic situation. It was a fine job, and I am sure we would all want to congratulate them.

Senator Comeau: Honourable senators, I simply want to be absolutely sure that there will be a completely open bidding process. I want to be absolutely sure that this will not be a non-bidder purchase.

Senator Fairbairn: Honourable senators, to my knowledge, the government has made that quite clear. I will check on that matter but, to the best of my knowledge, bids will be called for and, as I said earlier, are open to any bidder who meets the

specifications of the requirements. I do not believe there has been any change on that, but I will check.

EMPLOYMENT

FLUCTUATIONS IN JOB CREATION STATISTICS—
SITUATION IN QUEBEC—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Fernand Roberge: Honourable senators, employment figures for the month of November are quite disturbing. A net total of 64,000 jobs disappeared. Those 64,000 jobs were lost, if you exclude the growth in part-time employment. In the past 12 months, the Canadian economy generated only 41,000 new jobs, compared to an average of 189,000 new jobs per year over the past decade. That is not enough to give jobs to the young people now coming into the labour force. In fact, the number of youths aged 15 to 24 with jobs is down by 69,000 over this past year. The youth unemployment rate stands at 15.2 per cent. While the government likes to talk about the infrastructure program, Canada has 51,000 fewer jobs in construction, less than a year ago.

I find these figures quite disturbing. Does the government have an explanation for what is happening in the job market?

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, Senator Roberge will know that in the past two years there has been a very high level of job creation in this country. There is no question that the figures that came out just a few days ago were disappointing in terms of the fall in employment in November, which declined in terms of full-time employment but increased in terms of part-time employment. At any rate, the industries that were most affected in this area were goods-producing industries, service industries, as the honourable senator would know. The indicators are that the economy is not moving as swiftly as any of us would wish. Despite the employment decline in November, the average level of employment for the past two months is at 0.7 per cent, which on an annual basis is above its third quarter level — not much, but a bit above. If there is one hopeful sign, it is the increase in the help-wanted index across this country.

Honourable senators, having said all that, the statistics are deeply distressing. Because of the increase on the one hand and the decrease on the other hand, we are not seeing a change in the unemployment percentage in Canada. The rate has to be of great concern to all of us. It certainly is to the government, which is why it is putting a continued emphasis not just on job-creation measures but also on efforts to help Canadians. For example, training, retraining and skill development are in some of the new measures that have been put on the table by the Minister of Human Resources Development. The country is making a distinct effort, and the government along with it, to get Canadians working and to a level where they can be competitive in the job market. This is very much at the heart of the government's agenda.