

Oral Questions

Quebec government respect and ratify the agreement signed on July 19.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the minister has made himself look better and convinced anyone by discrediting the present commandant of the college, saying that he knows nothing about the operation, when he is himself appointed by the government to run the college. He is the government's representative to lead the college and the institution and we are being told that he does not know his work. They are hiding behind nameless officials who are under the minister's thumb.

Obviously, the minister still thinks that he alone is right on this issue. Does he share Col. Parisien's opinion that the college in Kingston cannot provide officer cadets with proper support to join the armed forces as French-speaking members and that their dropout rate will be higher?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is only appropriate since we are now not talking about the entente between the Government of Quebec and the Canada but rather the operations between the Canadian armed forces that I reply to the hon. member's question.

The commandant in question was sent this summer to wind down CMR. He was not involved in the original decision making and is therefore not fully apprised of all of the financial facts that were available to me as minister and to the department when the closure was announced.

What has happened here is something that should be explained. The commandant like a lot of base commanders across this country, faced with a lot of very frustrated and angry and upset people who are losing their jobs because of the base closures, whether they be in Chatham, Cornwallis, Dartmouth or North Bay, is trying to deal with his people in the best way possible.

In good faith he thought he was being helpful to the cause. We have pointed out to him that the facts in his letter do not add up. I now believe that the commandant realizes that the situation as we had described it originally and the facts upon which the original decision was based is the correct one.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once on site, the commandant of the college in Saint-Jean who was tasked with closing the college realized that the orders he had been given made no sense. This, I think, justifies his position.

In his report tabled today, the Auditor General states that infrastructure mismanagement in the Canadian Forces costs the Canadian government over \$100 million a year. Furthermore,

the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs claims that closing the college in Saint-Jean will save \$23 million, but he is very careful not to subtract from this \$23 million the amount added to the budget of the college in Kingston for the teaching activities that will be transferred there.

Why does the government not admit that it erred by cutting the military college in Saint-Jean instead of targeting poor management practices that every year cost four times the total budget for all teaching activities in Saint-Jean?

[English]

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government made the right decision for financial reasons to close the two military colleges, Royal Roads and Collège Militaire Royal in Saint-Jean, regrettable as that may be. In fact we closed a number of facilities across the country. It has caused a lot of hardship to many communities.

What I think should not be lost sight of here is that the tactics of the opposition, the Bloc Québécois, and the Government of Quebec are really distracting the focus of attention of those people who have to make a very important decision in their lives. By January 7 they have to decide whether or not to take the government offer, the civilian reduction plan, a program which has been offered to them.

What is happening is that hon. members opposite and their tactics are giving those people hope that somehow this decision will be reversed. The decision will not be reversed and they are doing themselves and the people of the province of Quebec a great disservice.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the opposition wants to offer renewed hope to the people of Saint-Jean, unlike the minister who stubbornly refuses to change his mind.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval): As the Auditor General of Canada said, the government continues to spend millions of dollars more on its real property than what is needed. These expenditures, says the Auditor General, are based on ill-considered political decisions.

Does the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs realize that building the infrastructure needed to accommodate 1,200 officer cadets in Kingston, when this number will be reduced to 900 within two years, is a waste of money, especially since such facilities already exist in Saint-Jean?

[English]

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of factual errors in the hon. member's question.