



McCallum admits to navy cuts

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OTTAWA (CP) -- Some navy programs will be cut to help the Defence Department make up a big budgetary shortfall, Defence Minister John McCallum acknowledged Thursday.

"There are stresses on the defence budget," McCallum said in response to a question from Canadian Alliance MP Keith Martin.

"Some low-priority items in the navy's budget are being postponed as a result of the need to live within our budget. This is responsible behaviour from the point of view of the taxpayer."

McCallum said there is a lot of water to defend around Canada and it would be "working more closely" with the United States in order to defend it.



CH TV

He wouldn't specify what programs will be affected.

Martin said the government's "systematic neglect" of the military is threatening the safety and security of Canadians.

"This is not a small problem," he said. "It is acute."

McCallum has delayed an update on Canada's military while he considers a projected shortfall of between \$100 million and \$200 million this year.

The military has only 40 per cent of the money it needs to maintain bases and equipment in 2002-03.

Sources in the defence community fear the military will face major cuts in some areas to get more elsewhere. One defence community source said it appears tanks, self-propelled howitzer guns, destroyers and resupply vessels may be on the chopping block.

For the navy, that would mean losing its ability as a self-sustaining task force, said the source.

But McCallum said the navy's highest priorities will be maintained and spending has only been deferred in areas "that are not central to the defence of Canada or the fight against terrorism."

Martin, who represents the B.C. riding of Esquimalt-Juan de Fuca, which includes the West Coast's largest naval base, said domestic patrols of Canada's shorelines may be cancelled.

The patrols, which include interdiction of drug and human-smuggling operations, are an integral part of Canada's national security, Martin said.

Other measures being considered by the navy include docking ships for five-month stretches and cancelling

training missions, he said.

"Unfortunately, the problems we are seeing in the navy today are just the tip of the iceberg," said Martin, citing maintenance problems and personnel shortfalls in the army, for one.

He called on the Liberal government to invest an additional \$1.5 billion a year in defence over the next five years.

"If they don't, the military will become nothing more than a handmaiden to our partners and allies," Martin said. "Not only will this be a blow to Canadian prestige, it will also threaten our sovereignty.

"The military and our nation deserve better."

Conservative defence critic Elsie Wayne said the government is cutting where it should be investing.

"(Defence) should be the No. 1 priority for this government if they want to protect all Canadians," she said. "It's a major concern."

McCallum also announced Thursday that Ottawa is abandoning plans to privatize the defence supply. He said the decision to go with an internal program will yield greater savings, faster, without any upfront investment.

The privatization plan would have required more than \$40 million right off.

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