

Navy eyes patrol cuts to reduce expenses, says MP

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Some navy programs will be cut to help the Defence Department make up a big budgetary shortfall, Defence Minister John McCallum acknowledges.

"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," he told the Commons.

McCallum wouldn't specify what programs will be affected. But Esquimalt-Juan de Fuca MP Keith Martin said Friday that one of the options is cutting back on routine coastal patrols aimed at catching drug runners and ships smuggling either humans or contraband.

The Alliance MP said that chronic underfunding of Canada's military is undermining our international reputation and putting domestic security and even our sovereignty at risk.

Martin, at home in his riding, said military underfunding over most of the last decade, coupled with increases costs tied to the war on terrorism, have put the Armed Forces in financial purgatory.

He wants to know what McCallum sees as low priority.

"We've been trying for three days to get an answer on where those cuts are going to come and we still haven't heard," Martin said.

"We've heard that they're going to stop doing some of the routine patrols in our waters in an effort to save money."

What's needed, he said, are not cuts but a massive infusion of cash -- Martin is calling for an additional \$1.5 billion annually -- a decision that must come from the Prime Minister's Office.

Martin said there are a number of risks involved by not adequately funding the military. There's a risk of burnout by the best military people available, who are being cycled through missions too quickly, without adequate time to prepare or recover.

There's a risk that the country will not be able to honour its existing international commitments because of a lack of equipment, manpower or training.

And there's a risk that domestic requirements, including military response in times of domestic crisis or disaster, will not be met because the resources are spread too thinly.

"Our reputation has been greatly diminished internationally by our failure to put sufficient resources into our military," he said. "That affects us economically and even threatens our security."

McCallum has delayed an update on the 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.

One defence community source said it appears tanks, self-propelled howitzer guns, destroyers and resupply



MP Keith Martin

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."

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