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## **Russian Roulette With Passenger Safety in British Columbia**

**OTTAWA**— “The government continues to search the world for a used hovercraft when Canadian builders can build a new hovercraft in less time than it has taken to locate a used hovercraft for refit,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond). “Its time that this government stopped playing Russian Roulette with passenger safety in British Columbia and purchased a new state-of-the-art hovercraft for the Coast Guard’s Vancouver Airport base.”

In Question Period Cummins challenged the Minister of Fisheries on the Coast Guard’s ability to handle a marine disaster, the BC passenger ferry fire yesterday or the rescue of passengers from a passenger jet forced to ditch on the tidal flats near the Vancouver Airport, without even one hovercraft available to respond to a distress call:

**Cummins:** Mr. Speaker, the Coast Guard response to the fire yesterday aboard the B.C. ferry, Queen of Surrey, was woefully inadequate.

The Coast Guard attended the scene with all the equipment available to it at the time: A 41 foot cutter from the Kitsilano Coast Guard base, a 24 foot inflatable from the Gibson Coast Guard Auxiliary and a helicopter from Comox.

Fortunately the weather was kind and evacuation of 350 passengers was not required, but what if an evacuation had been required? How could this tiny fleet effect a massive rescue effort?

**Thibault:** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely ridiculous. That was a very good response. Three vessels were sent there. The military was there with its Cormorant helicopter. B.C. ferries were there with a spare vessel. Had it been necessary, we could have evacuated everyone off of that ferry. There was a great response by the crew of the ferry and they should all be congratulated.

**Cummins:** Mr. Speaker, obviously the Minister does not know the capability of his equipment. Missing from yesterday’s emergency was the only vessel capable of carrying sufficient life rafts and operating near the shore: the hovercraft based at Vancouver Airport. It was laid up for repair.

Yesterday it was 350 passengers aboard a B.C. ferry. Tomorrow it could be 350 passengers aboard a jumbo jet on the tidal flats off the airport where a hovercraft is the only vessel capable of functioning. When is the government going to--

**Thibault:** Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the Member take a trip on one of the B.C. ferries or any other commercial vessel and he will notice that these vessels do carry life rafts capable of taking care of their passengers. They had a second ferry there to respond. We had three vessels and a military helicopter. It was a great response by all agencies and above all a super response by the crew of the B.C. ferries who put out the fire safely, not needing any evacuation.

Cummins was disappointed by Thibault’s dismissive attitude toward search and rescue on the West Coast.