

Oral Questions

government's broken promises. Would the minister explain why he has failed with his cabinet colleagues to obtain sufficient funding for this most vital sector of Canada's economy where there are problems with creating jobs and upgrading careers? The minister's failure is probably the result of not enough effort in cabinet and because of his two hats, namely, the important matter of the environment which he shares with science and technology, to the serious detriment of science and technology and the condemnation of the science community.

Mr. Roberts: Madam Speaker, generally I try to accommodate the hon. member, but I would be misleading the House if I were to say that I failed. I have not failed.

Mr. Nielsen: Roberts for leader.

Mr. Roberts: The hon. member is forecasting, I hope pessimistically, what the level of funding will be. As I said in my earlier response, those decisions have not yet been definitively taken. I do not believe that I shall fail in meeting the expenditures which are required.

COMPARISON OF RATES OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I would like to determine, perhaps once and for all, the rate of the minister's failure—

Mr. Crosbie: It is total.

Miss MacDonald:—and to point out to him that last year the Conservative government increased funding to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council by \$41 million, to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council by \$5.8 million, and to the Medical Research Council by \$12 million. The minister said on May 5 that he would do more than the Conservative government, that he would increase the funding considerably above figures put forward by the Conservatives. I have listed the levels of funding that would have been granted to each of those councils. Will the minister stand by his commitment that he will increase, this year, the amount to those granting councils by more than the Conservative government? Is that what he is now saying?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, I am saying that there will be further increases in the budget of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. I am also saying the government has far exceeded the figures which were established by the Conservative government with regard to science and technology development and research and development.

Miss MacDonald: Madam Speaker, the minister, of course, would not give the commitment now which he gave in May; he is backing away. That is the flip-flop which the minister has made with regard to these very important research granting councils and which we would like to point out. That flip-flop has been condemned by the whole scientific community Madam Speaker. They have termed the action of the minister

the ultimate doublecross. In face of the charges that have been made, does the minister realize that this program of funding for the research councils cannot be something that is started and stopped, something that is a stop and go policy? What explanation does he have for the approach that is taken, that in one year under the Conservative government it is adequately funded, and the next year it is severely cut back?

● (1420)

Mr. Roberts: Madam Speaker, I am sorry, but I simply have to reiterate what I have already said. The hon. lady is anticipating a cutback which has not taken place and which I do not expect to take place. The basis of her question is erroneous.

CONCERN EXPRESSED BY SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina East): Madam Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of State for Science and Technology. The scientific community is indeed interested in the long-term funding plans and the intentions of the government. There are rumours of zero growth. The increases that have been announced are not increases that will cover the increased operating costs for scientific research. There is chaos, anger and frustration in the scientific community. That is shown in all the press releases that the scientific community has put out in the last few days. Will the minister tell this House and the scientific community what the funding will be for the federal granting agencies, and will he clearly state what they can expect?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, there are expressions of concern on the part of the scientific community. I admit that, and I welcome it. I am glad that the scientific community is making its concerns known as dramatically as possible. The hon. gentleman has asked me to announce what will be in the estimates before the decisions on the estimates have definitively been taken. Clearly, I cannot make an announcement on a decision that has not been taken.

Mr. de Jong: A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Normally the scientific community knows by the previous November what the funding will be but it is now in a state of utter confusion. When will the minister let the scientific community know what is in store in the years to come? The president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, Dr. Gordon MacNabb has stated that funding of at least \$27.8 million above inflation is needed to maintain the five-year plan for R and D which was endorsed by the Liberal government last year. By slashing the budgets of the granting councils—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I have to ask the hon. member to come to his question.