

Government Orders

excess of \$2 billion. In other words the companies that took part in this program reported sales of about \$2 billion on an investment of only \$150 million.

I might add that a Conservative government survey revealed that IRAP is the most popular government program in the private sector. Why would this program be so popular, Mr. Speaker? Why such a huge economic fallout? It is because this program is closely linked to the NRC's laboratories, because we could count on the scientists to evaluate a project and determine whether it was feasible or not.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments today by saying that. I hope I have been able to show you how critical it is to maintain basic research and, indeed, the absolutely fundamental need to pursue our basic research efforts so that we can benefit from significant industrial activity.

Mrs. Suzanne Duplessis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State (Science and Technology)): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I would like to assure my honorable colleague who has a great concern for everything regarding science and technology that this government fully recognizes the importance of basic research. It is recognized, however, whether it is performed at the National Research Council or in universities and it is recognized as a national insurance designed to help us deal with social needs and also national needs to ensure national competitiveness.

I would like to give the honorable member some figures, for the sake of comparison, on what other countries spend on basic research. In Canada, 14 per cent of the science and technology budgets go to basic research. In France, it is 15 per cent; in Germany, 12 per cent; in Japan, 7 per cent and, in the United States, 4 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I think, therefore, that the Government of Canada is doing its share to promote basic scientific research. But I wish to repeat to the hon. member that it is not because in 1985 National Research Council officials were asked to submit a five-year plan, as is the case now, that they will run out of funds this year and they will have to submit another one for the next five years—it does not mean because the five-year plan is being submitted, that basic scientific research will stop.

This is a government which looks to the future and knows where it is going and which has its priorities well in hand.

For the information of my hon. friend, I must emphasize that the funding to the IRAP Program was not cut. In fact, the budget states that NRC's grants and contributions will not change from the previous level. It is therefore possible that some components of the IRAP Program might be governed by new policies and practices which will make assistance to businesses dependent upon conditions more consistent with those of the commercial sector.

Furthermore, I wish to advise him that the President of Treasury Board will soon develop guidelines for the implementation of this policy and will make the announcement. Just the same, the decision will not affect the applications received before February 19 which are already in the system.

The government recognizes that the IRAP is the most successful program when it comes to helping the industry and it is committed to it.

Again I will tell my hon. friend that basic scientific research is very important to the Government of Canada.

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary in a way strengthened my argument. She compared the level of basic research done in Canada, in our universities and in the NRC, to that in France, Japan and the United States, but apparently she forgot that the bottom line is that Canada is only doing half what those other countries are doing. We are falling far behind them in research and development and our weaknesses are unbelievable.

• (1320)

Therefore, instead of reciting all the items in her strategy and quoting all kinds of statistics, I would simply like her to reply to a very simple question.

Her Leader, the Prime Minister, stated before he was first elected that he would increase twofold the Canadian research and development effort during his first term. As we know, the opposite happened. Canadian research and development expenditures have plummeted since the government was elected. Therefore, what specific action does this government intend to take