

*Health Resources Fund Act*

● (1602)

[English]

I think that some of the members of parliament who will speak later on today on this funding may want to use this forum to give us help, if I may use that expression, in respect of the possible reductions, anticipated reductions, or non-existent reductions in medical research funds.

May I take a few minutes to review very rapidly the situation as regards the medical research scene in Canada. Basically two channels are used as sources of funds by researchers on the federal scene. The largest and well-known one is, of course, the Medical Research Council, which was provided with a budget of \$60,002,000 for the current year in the main estimates, which was increased last June by an additional \$3 million. This represents an 11 per cent increase over the previous fiscal year, 1977-78 and, therefore, is quite good. However, during the process of locating restraints in every department and agency I, unfortunately, had to reduce by \$500,000 the base budget for the council for 1979-80. That is really a minimal amount. Negotiations are taking place at this time with Treasury Board to determine what will be the real increase for 1979-80 for the Medical Research Council. Up to this point I have been pleased with the government's stand on the increase for the Medical Research Council.

I am also very pleased that the cabinet is currently studying a proposal for the stable funding of the Medical Research Council to ensure that the level of biomedical research in Canada is maintained, and I hope to be able to make an early announcement in this regard.

As to the other avenue for grants and contributions for medical research use, biomedical researchers at the federal level turn to what we call in the jargon the NHRDP, the National Health Research and Development Program, of my own department. That program had a budget for the current fiscal year of \$12 million. Unfortunately I had to reduce it by \$2 million. At this point I would like to state quite clearly that I hope this apparently important cut of \$2 million from \$12 million will not affect the grants and contributions as much as it will overhead costs of NHRDP.

The MRC should be congratulated for the remarkable work it does in keeping administrative costs to a very minimum. I wish I had the figures with me. They can be given later in the debate. I want to mention particularly the fact that all the people who serve on the Medical Research Council, close to 150, and the experts who serve on the committees of the peer review system that exists in the MRC to allocate funds to the research projects submitted, work on a completely voluntary basis. That is remarkable when we think of the numerous corporations and Crown corporations, private and public, that pay per diem fees to their members. The people serving on the MRC are not paid, and I wanted to point that out to other Canadians because I think this represents a remarkable contribution to medical research in this country.

I hope to have the NHRDP of my own department take the example of the MRC and decrease their administrative over-

[Miss Bégin.]

head costs as much as possible. Let me point out that while the administrative costs of the program are comparatively higher, they are subject to the requirements of the Auditor General and to our own audit of various grants and contributions.

Let me conclude by saying that the health resources fund during the period 1966-78 has met the objective of providing necessary facilities on a national basis to train health personnel in sufficient numbers to meet current and anticipated demands. This has also equipped the provinces and the territories with beautiful and very well regarded medical facilities, hospitals and laboratories, located throughout the country.

In concluding my remarks at second reading of a measure to cancel the national health resources fund two years earlier than forecast, let me say to the medical community, in particular the biomedical community, I wish them well for continuing development. We have established with Canadian taxpayers' money the basis of a good network of health facilities throughout the country; that is very important, and that was the purpose of this fund. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca):** Mr. Speaker, I was rather amazed at the approach the minister has taken, speaking on behalf of the government, concerning this rather shabby piece of legislation. She seems to indicate that medical research in this country is in better condition than it has ever been and that there really are no problems in this field.

Let me quote from Dr. Jacques Genest, director of the Clinical Research Institute of Montreal, the minister's own city. He said:

No other nation of the western world has treated biomedical research in such a disastrous way—

● (1612)

That does not confirm what the minister just told us about this. He went on to say that one of the results of this policy is that between 300 and 500 biomedical research workers were lost in the fierce competition for funds. I wonder why the minister does not explain that, if things are going so well in research.

Dr. Genest went on to say that professional insecurity has killed the motivation of young doctors who need to train for five years in a specialty and spend another four or five years becoming research workers.

Those are statements by a person who is dedicating his entire life to research. They are somewhat contrary to what the minister has tried to lead us to believe. In her introduction she seemed to praise the health resources fund while chopping it. That is a rather paradoxical approach to government. She cannot have it both ways, Mr. Speaker—she cannot be talking out of both sides of her mouth about this fund. Either the fund is good and deserves support, or it is bad and deserves to be chopped. She is saying it is good and deserves to be chopped. That kind of logic does not make much sense to me, and I am sure it is only logic that the Liberal government of this day could put forward.