

*Government Orders*

have alluded to earlier, thereby ensuring prosperity for all Canadians and for all citizens of the world.

**Mr. Raymond Skelly (North Island—Powell River):** Mr. Speaker, on the important issue of government initiatives in research and testing facilities, I would like to give the member an example of what was in place in British Columbia. It involved basic environmental testing facilities which were equipped with scientists in government owned labs. It was their responsibility to test the impact of various operations on the environment.

The Government of British Columbia decided the best course of action, following on the Conservative model, was to sell off those labs or close them and get rid of them. What we have now is a situation in which private contractors who work for the companies in normal situations are the same people who are hired by the government on a private basis to produce environmental impact studies for the government and for the people of that province.

Thus perhaps the most severe conflict that one could imagine is taking place. There is a real distortion of the needs of people because of the government's very short-sighted privatization fixation, if you will, and because of the tremendous conflict of interest that is now in place.

We see the same kind of model at work here with the NRC and with the effects of the government selling off its assets, proposing to privatize those labs, giving them away for a song to private industry which will use them in a very narrow capacity. Also, public confidence is being broken in terms of the testing process. That data not only has to be produced so that people can make informed decisions about the kind of industrial and development activity that takes place. They must also have credibility. The data must come forward with credibility because of the objectivity of the group involved.

In British Columbia we have one of the worst examples of a conflict of interest and a lack of credibility in the data if it is produced that one can imagine. We are developing the same thing here through Conservative initiatives at the NRC. Would the member like to comment on that?

**Mr. Pagtakhan:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly concur with my hon. colleague as to the importance of proceeding

with research that would assure that the environment is protected. As we protect the environment today, we are protecting the future of our children.

What I detect from the hon. member's question is the need for academic freedom for researchers to be able to pursue their research without fear of the politicians, without fear of the uncertainty that funding will not be there next year.

I also detect in the hon. member's question the need for the independence of the National Research Council, for it to be able to propose bold initiatives in the area of the environment without being deflected by the government of the day in terms of its political agenda.

I think it is most crucial that if basic research is to continue we have to encourage our universities, our scientists and science teachers to go on with their duties, obligations and mission unfettered, unhindered and unafraid of the uncertainty of political actions.

**Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount):** Mr. Speaker, in participating in this debate on the question of the National Research Council and basic research at the National Research Council, it is important to try to put the debate into some kind of perspective to allow Canadians to determine the significance of the prospect of cutting basic research at the NRC. I propose to do so in the following manner, Mr. Speaker.

It is no secret that in today's world, human resources, research and development, and knowledge generally speaking have become critical factors in international competition. It is also no secret that Canada's economic prosperity is still largely based on the exploitation of natural resources.

Several weeks ago representatives from the Canadian Advanced Technology Association appeared before the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology and reminded us once again that Canada depends largely on natural resources for our economic prosperity. They showed us figures pertaining to Canada's balance of trade in manufactured products. We have a large surplus—I think it amounts to \$17 billion or \$18 billion—in exports of resource related products. However we have large deficits in technological products, in low technology products, in medium technology products and in high technology products.