

Government Orders

In the current climate, it is preferable to limit the number of people speaking on behalf of NRC.

Contrary to the policy that scientists are free to speak out on their areas of expertise, the memo states: "If a reporter calls you, please do not answer", instead call the head of the communications section. That is stifling and gagging people. The very people who should be front and centre in the debate about the future of the National Research Council, because it is fundamental to the future of science in this country, are being told they cannot speak out.

Good research is done by teams of people. These teams take time to assemble. They can be broken up quickly, but they cannot be rebuilt quickly. The actions that are taking place at NRC, not only are removing good people at NRC from the fields in which they are expert, but are discouraging young people from coming into the National Research Council and discouraging young people from careers in science.

What we do at the National Research Council affects far more than the people who are there and the programs that are there. It creates a whole atmosphere. It exacerbates the problem of lack of understanding and lack of support for basic science. We who are leaders in this country have an obligation to give our scientists the freedom to say to the public that science is important, not only for what happens this year and next year but for what happens for the next century in this country and in the world.

We see a total lack of direction. How could the government, in 1986, abolish the Environmental Institute, cut out energy programs, cut out environmental technology and then decide, in 1990, that that is this year's priority. What is likely to happen is that we are going to see the chemistry division turned into an environmental division. What a stupid waste of money. What a stupid waste of people's lives, careers and expertise. How can anybody justify that kind of nonsense?

I want to finish with a few quotes from Canada's most recent Nobel Prize winner. Is it not ironic that in 1986, within the very week that Dr. Polanyi was being named Canada's latest Nobel Prize winner in science, the very lab where he had started his work was being destroyed at NRC. He was not alone. The Basinskis internationally

acclaimed for 30 years for their leading expertise in research which led to developments of tremendous amounts of technology over the years, were having their lab closed down and their lives' work ended.

At that time, Dr. Polanyi was appealing for the National Research Council and for basic research and when talking about his own work stated:

Had they asked whether the research was likely to produce applications and whether those applications would accord with the socioeconomic priorities of the day, they would surely have despaired of our work after a few years.

He talks about how the work which led to his Nobel Prize in 1986 started in 1957, not with the technology, not with an object in mind, but simply because people were seeking basic knowledge that they knew would lead to benefits for humanity as a whole. When asked by a young science student where he should plan his career, Dr. Polanyi stated that his advice to a talented and ambitious Canadian scientist would be that he go abroad. Dr. Polanyi stated that he did not relish giving him that response, but that at this juncture in our scientific history, which was in the middle of the first round of cuts to NRC, it was the only answer he could give. He also stated that it is not by chance that we talk about research and development. We do not talk about development and research. The research comes first.

• (1350)

Ms. Joy Langan (Mission—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her intervention and her commitment to research and development.

I was interested to hear her comments about the opinions of the Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Polanyi. I wonder if the hon. member could advise the House whether or not she and her colleagues have pursued this question with Liberal leadership candidates to see what their views are on such an important question.

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I think that is an inappropriate question for the floor of the House. The member knows well where the Liberal party stands on these issues, where I personally stand on these issues and where my colleague, the critic for science and technology stands. All she has to do is to listen day after day in this House to know where the Liberal party stands.

Ms. Joy Langan (Mission—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I suspect that the hon. member is aware that the Speaker will rule what is an inappropriate