

Government Orders

My amendment simply removes this special provision for the astronaut scientists and gives the agency the authority that the NRC already has, under which these scientists already live and that DND enjoys, to develop classifications for all its scientific personnel that reflect their talent and their contribution to the space program.

The third amendment deals with those people whose position is transferred to the agency. I believe the minister has somewhat agreed that it corrects the bill to say what, in fact, it was intended to say, that people whose positions are transferred to the agency do not have to compete for their own jobs.

The government has a provision in Clause 28 of the bill that says that this applies only for 90 days or three months after the space agency is formally established in law. That is of concern to the people working for the agency now because while they are allowed to transfer with the position to the agency within 90 days and not have to compete for their own jobs. If their position is moved on day 91, after this bill comes into effect, they would then be in a position where they would have to compete for the job they have held for many, many years.

I know it is the intention of the agency to transfer all positions immediately. That may or may not happen, however, and I believe that the professionals working for the agency, in fact, all the staff working in positions that will go to the agency, deserve the protection of not having to fight for their own job just because it is transferred to the agency. It has taken three years to put the agency in place, and even eight months after the final announcement, vital questions about the structure and functioning of the agency have not been resolved. The employees have little reason to be confident that all the issues with respect to the transfer of positions will be resolved in 90 days. If it cannot be done in eight months, how can the government assure them that it can be done in 90 days? I suggest that it does no harm to remove the 90 day provision to give some assurances to valuable employees that their rights will be protected.

Incidentally, the 90 days is there because when the bill was first written two and a half years ago there was no certainty that the transfer of positions could be accomplished in less than that time. Other things were written two and a half years ago, including the press release announcing the establishment of the agency. At that

time, there was no question of moving labs and people. Its purpose was simply to establish a consolidation and a new administrative structure for the people working in the government labs and programs that constitute Canada's space program.

The program was and is working very well close to the seat of government and close to all the international connections that are so important. The government let this become a political football thereby delaying the progress of the space program, delaying many vital and costly decisions of the space industry, and, as one person with several years experience with the European Space Agency said: "Making Canada an international laughing stock."

The Prime Minister has already shown his lack of understanding of the space program, and the lack of value he gives to the people who are responsible for Canada's enviable international reputation, when he suggests that they can be replaced as easily as a burnt out light bulb.

He is wrong. Without the handful of people in our space program, we do not have a space program. These people will transfer to the agency because it opens up to them other opportunities in the Public Service of Canada and because that transfer does not immediately mean any decision about relocating the family or themselves. Whether they will eventually go with the agency when it moves to its new headquarters in St. Hubert will depend on how well the government listens and responds to their concerns. There has not been much evidence in the last eight months that this is happening.

• (1040)

I urge the House to adopt the amendments, and I urge the members on the other side of the House to educate and coerce the Prime Minister to treat these people with the respect and consideration they deserve, or the fears of some of the members opposite will become a reality. The space agency in St. Hubert will be a nice new building, but it will indeed be an empty shell.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity this morning to speak on Bill C-16, an Act to establish the Canadian Space Agency and to provide for other matters in relation to space, and in particular on the excellent amendments proposed by my colleague from Okanagan—Shuswap, which will amend