

Oral Questions

[Translation]

RESEARCH

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance.

I have here a letter from the president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, who wrote recently to the presidents of Canadian universities to inform them, and I quote: "That budget cutbacks may oblige the Council to reduce the number of researchers subsidized by the federal government".

In his Budget, the Minister of Finance claimed that to increase productivity, we must invest in training and developing the skills of Canadians. Could the minister explain to the House how a reduction in the number of researchers financed by the federal government will help meet the objectives set in his Budget?

[English]

Hon. William C. Winegard (Minister for Science): Mr. Speaker, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council for the year we are just moving into is receiving a total increase of something like 4.8 per cent. Under the existing circumstances I think that is a reasonable amount.

In talking to the president of NSERC, my understanding is that it is going to put more and more of that money into the operating and scholarship components of its operation and less into some other parts, which in essence is what the member is asking for.

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, again, I have a letter here from the president of the council which states that given the budgetary constraints facing NSERC one of the likely effects of these changes will be a reduction in the number of researchers supported. This is a letter written just recently to presidents of universities across Canada.

I would remind the minister that two years ago the Prime Minister's own blue ribbon committee recommended doubling the budgets for university research in Canada. I want to ask the minister a question.

Given that such an investment would lead to increased productivity, increased growth, and a lower deficit, will the minister on behalf of the government at last commit to providing the urgently needed funding for university research and the training of researchers right across this country?

Hon. William C. Winegard (Minister for Science): Mr. Speaker, I think it is quite apparent to most Canadians that if we do not get this national debt under control, if we do not get interest rates down and subsequently get the dollar down, it will not matter much what you are going to put into the NSERC or the MRCs. There will be no base funding for the universities, and that is really the issue.

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THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister on the important issue of the future of the country in the constitutional sense.

Given discussions in Montreal about the Allaire committee over the weekend, the fact that Belanger-Campeau will report very soon, and the fact that we have a committee of federal deputy ministers studying things such as the division of powers, I want to ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether or not the time has now arrived when members of this House—his party, my party and the Liberal Party—should be looking at substantive constitutional issues such as aboriginal rights and the division of powers.

Given the fact that the committee on the amending formula will start travelling and will have public hearings next week, would he not consider expanding the mandate of the committee to deal not just with the amending formula, which is important, but to allow Canadians to speak about national unity regardless of its process or content?

Have we not arrived at that time?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing preventing members of this House looking at substantive issues in connection with our constitutional future. In fact I would think that many of them are doing just that.