

jurisdiction of the provinces, somehow—and I do not have the magic answer—we have to stimulate young people to be interested, to be inquisitive and to want to grasp the sciences and to go into engineering and to our science portfolios.

I appreciate the hon. member's questions. I can assure him that we are not privatizing the NRC, and that we are not limiting our basic research. It is very important and it will continue to be important.

• (1340)

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, when I was 18 and just leaving high school, the very first job I applied for was at the National Research Council. I had no idea then that I would be standing here all these years later fighting a battle to preserve that institution. One of the proudest moments of my life was when I was accepted for a job in hot and cold state physics at the National Research Council.

I had grown up with the view of this institution epitomizing Canada's excellence in fields of research that were not happening anywhere else in the world, epitomizing our progress and adventurous spirit and our high stature, despite the fact that we were such a small country.

Things changed that summer, and I ended up going back to university and eventually making other decisions about the course of my life. Otherwise, I might have been sitting in the gallery today wondering what my fate was going to be instead of standing here defending those people who have made this country great and created our reputation internationally and continue to do so, despite the hammering that they have received at the hands of this government.

I want to talk about the people. The new frontiers of human endeavour are no longer the frontiers of geography, distance and climate. They are the frontiers of the human mind. We only conquer those frontiers and go beyond them with people of courage, commitment and dedication who are prepared to work for years and sometimes for decades with no specific results, except the pursuit of a new idea that eventually will lead somewhere. I will come back to that theme. I want to talk a little more about how the people who have done this for the country are being treated.

Government Orders

Aside from the cut-backs, aside from the people who are leaving—and they are now in the hundreds—the people who have been forced, coerced or cajoled into leaving are lost to us as a nation, not just to the National Research Council. As a nation these people are lost to us. The whole atmosphere has been demoralizing.

Mr. Perron writes one thing, and then he sends an internal memo to employees which states something else. On the one hand, he reaffirms to the employees the commitment to excellence and basic research. On the other hand, in another document he states: "We will be trimming our basic research to the bare minimum necessary for a minimal insurance policy", whatever the heck that means.

He talks about planned partnerships and working with others in his memo to the employees, and then in another memo talks about planned partnerships as the driving force behind the National Research Council. Planned partnerships are not a driving force, they are not an objective or a mission for an organization. They are tools to accomplish certain things. But to say something like that is to be the driving force is absolutely ridiculous.

It is no wonder people are demoralized, wondering where their life's work is going and wondering where their careers are going. They are being treated inhumanely as employees. There is an unofficial attrition program at the National Research Council that is far more vicious than many of the formal ones taking place in the public service. People are unprotected. They are obviously being hushed up when they retire early. We have statements and numerous clippings over the last three years which indicate that people are not free to comment. Why are we buying off people? People who have dedicated their lives to this country deserve decent treatment when they leave.

The most important thing is that scientists are being prevented from speaking out about what they and they alone know. What is wrong with free and open examination in the media of the implications of the actions of the government in cutting millions of dollars from the budget of the prime institution of basic research in this country?

There was a memorandum sent to the employees of the National Research Council which stated: