

Adjournment Debate

FORESTRY—TASK FORCE ON FUTURE OF CANADIAN FORESTRY SERVICE

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, on October 31, 1978, I directed a question to the Minister of State (Environment) (Mr. Marchand) with regard to the problems that have arisen in the forestry service of Canada because of the government's announcement of cutbacks. While my question related to the forestry industry, the forestry ministry and the agencies of the forestry department, and the impact of that department's work on the industry in Canada, the purport of my question in relation to government cutbacks applies to cutbacks of every scientific endeavour of every department of government.

I have not heard for a long time such an outpouring of concern by scientists with regard to the programs that will be affected by this latest series of cutbacks. The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) said he intended to be tough. He should also have said the government intended to be stupid in the ill-considered and irrational way in which it has approached these cutbacks.

● (2207)

In my question with respect to forestry management I asked that the government give consideration to the formation of a task force to look at the future of the Canadian Forestry Service and the development and continuation of the federal forestry program. I asked the minister whether he had received that request for the setting up of a task force. He said he had. That request was put to him in a telex on October 12, 1978. The members of the Forestry Institute wanted him to examine the impact of the cuts and the whole relationship with the forestry service. That task force is important not only because it was requested by the specialists in the field but because its report was to be available quickly, much more quickly than was suggested by the minister. The date suggested by the Institute is December 15, 1978.

They asked as well that the cutbacks and changes be deferred until the report was received. That was a reasonable request, Mr. Speaker. In answer to the second request, the minister indicated he would consider the representation which was made by me, and I think it is important that he should do so and examine the matter in the light of the importance of this Institute and its relation to the forest industry.

The forest industry is vast. One of every ten Canadian jobs is connected with forest products. These products sell for \$12 billion, 14 per cent of the value of all manufactured goods in Canada. Almost one dollar in every five earned abroad comes from forest products. The industry is our largest source of foreign exchange. Its earnings rival those of agriculture and minerals combined. A third of the world's exports of lumber, pulp and paper come from Canada. About \$1 billion in tax revenue accrue to the government from forest products.

When a member of parliament is faced with a mindless and ill-considered cutback program embarked upon by a government which then, as a result of pure politics, changes its position and damages another agency of government, it is

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

legitimate to say that perhaps the time has come when, with respect to these programs, and scientific programs in particular, a rational approach should be taken. So far, a rational approach has not been adopted, particularly with respect to forest products. That is why it is so important to consider favourably this request, coming from people in the Forest Management Institute, so as to ensure that any changes are made in an orderly manner. There are going to be losses. There are going to be changes. But I think we have to consider the importance of the forest industry and whether or not replacement funding can be raised to offset federal spending reductions in the time available, so that we may not lose the continuity of forest management research which has been conducted by the institute. While there is time, I think it is important that the government, through the parliamentary secretary, indicate to us that the ministry will consent to the establishment of this task force.

● (2212)

There have been representations that the specialists involved in the forest industry and in scientific areas of government be placed in other areas. Let us think about it for a moment. Where can we place, except in government, highly specialized men and women? I ask the government to think of the human side of it as well as the scientific side. Programs are stopped, careers are interrupted, and if this approach at rationalization as set forth in the request for the task force which I raised in the House of Commons is undertaken, I believe, with the expertise which is available from those men and women in the forestry service and in other scientific endeavours, ways could be found to give some respect to the proposition of restraint while at the same time not driving a horse and cart through these very important scientific programs which form the basis for job creation potential in those industries as we go down the road.

I ask these questions and request an answer because the answer is important for the people involved in the maintenance of the programs not only in the short term but also in the long term. It is important in the long term because of the employment, the job creation and the technology creation potential which is inherent in these forestry programs, which ought not be interrupted for any purpose. At least, they ought not to be interrupted in a mindless, irrational and blind way. This is the way this government has proceeded, and it has affected research programs in this country mightily. I ask the government to reconsider that mindless and irrational approach.

Mr. Jack Pearsall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the minister has in place a Canadian forestry advisory council chaired by Mr. R. C. Rogers, chairman and chief executive officer of Crown Zellerbach Canada Limited. It has members from labour, industry, the provinces and universities.

The minister met with the council today and asked for its advice on the federal role in promoting the rational use of Canada's forest resources, the needs, priorities and methods