

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I think the parliamentary secretary was just rereading sections of her speech, so there is really no point in responding to that.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I took some exception to the definition of undemocratic institutions, referring to our Armed Forces. I do not know if the hon. member is suggesting that we vote every time a colonel or captain makes a decision.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the issue of research and development and the cuts to the NRC. I would suggest that in general terms there is a lack of understanding of what is happening out there.

In my view there is no national standard to deal with the issue of education in the first place that can address and redirect our student population to the proper fields. For example, we have here in Canada 20 times more lawyers per capita than they have in Japan, while in Japan they have 10 times more engineers per capita in society as a whole. In the House of Commons we have approximately 56 to 60 lawyers. In comparison, we have about three engineers. If you consider those figures you have a pretty good idea of what is happening.

There is a lack of understanding and, in fact, a lack of commitment to the issue of education. The fact that the drop-out rate in our post-secondary institutions is approximately 30 per cent should tell us something.

• (1250)

In my view, the whole issue of research and development has to start at the very bottom end of the scale, that is, at the primary school level. We have to start encouraging more students to go into the research and development field, the science field and so on, and start building from the bottom up.

Condemning the government is the least we can do at this point in time.

Mr. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Mr. Speaker, what I referred to as undemocratic institutions are institutions that could fire a scientist who discovers something that the institution did not want him to discover. That is what happens in the case of the military. I think we have seen many examples of it both in Canada and in the United States.

I support 100 per cent what the member says about starting at the bottom end, I just do not agree that that is the bottom end. If we want to produce a good crop of scientists, the top end is the elementary schools. Instead of having a 27 per cent drop-out rate, we should be contributing the funding that is necessary to produce a good school system in this country so that we are turning out top quality scientists.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, the mussel poisonings in December 1987 threw the country into a public health safety crisis. In a matter of days, the health culprit was apprehended. Canadian researchers and scientists identified domoic acid as the responsible toxin.

The identification of this toxin was an historic achievement, an historic scientific breakthrough, thanks to the Atlantic Research Laboratory of the National Research Council.

Many more achievements have been made by this council, and many more will be made, but only if we continue to provide adequate funding. Complacency has no place if scientific breakthroughs are to continue.

That is why the topic we are debating today is such an extremely important one. I therefore support and congratulate my hon. colleague, the member for Ottawa South, for his motion:

That this House condemn the government for its failure to support the National Research Council as Canada's premier research institution and its failure to promote basic scientific research in Canada.

This is extremely important because science and technology will play a vital role in determining the future prosperity of all Canadians.

The NRC was formed in 1916 as the honorary advisory council for scientific and industrial research and in 1928 the national laboratory was founded. Between 1939 and 1952 reorganization was done to provide a strong foundation in basic science. The principle was established that the extramural budgets of the National Research Council should increase to match the intramural budget.

The NRC is the government's principal scientific research arm, the internationally renowned seedbed of Canada's two Nobel prizes. It has been a source of technological development, not only for Canadians but for citizens of the world.