

The Special Senate Committee on Science Policy

Evidence

Ottawa, Wednesday, December 3, 1975

The Special Committee of the Senate on Science Policy met this day at 10 a.m. to consider Canadian Government and other expenditures on scientific activities and matters relating thereto.

Senator Maurice Lamontagne (*Chairman*) in the Chair.

The Chairman: I would like to begin, so that we have the proper background for this new series of hearings, by making a short statement.

In an article published in September, 1975 in *Chemistry in Canada* entitled "The Politicians, are they really listening now?", Mr. Andrew Wilson, a science advisor to the Science Council, was complaining that:

Since the publication of the Senate committee's third volume two years ago the parliamentary science policy scene in Ottawa at least has been remarkably quiet.

Perhaps Mr. Wilson himself was not listening, because on July 10, 1975 our committee presented a report to the Senate in which it was seeking new terms of reference. This report was approved by the Senate on July 24, 1975. The new mandate authorizes the committee to consider and report on Canadian Government and other expenditures on scientific activities and matters related thereto.

In spite of the wide scope of this mandate, the committee has already indicated that it is intended to concentrate on three specific areas mentioned in its July 10 report:

First, we should make a survey of futures research programs being carried out within government departments and agencies and see how the Institute will develop its new area of activities . . .

Secondly, the committee should make a systematic review of the implementation of the recommendations contained in its report on science policy. In 1972 and 1973 we made about 73 formal recommendations and many more other suggestions. We know that many of these proposals have been accepted by the government but it is impossible to see how they have been implemented without meeting those who have that responsibility . . .

Thirdly, the committee should hold hearings on the Canadian science budget. In Volume 3 of our report, we recommended that the government present in an annual document its estimates of expenditures for scientific activities and that a committee of the Senate be authorized to make an overall review of those estimates. On February 28, 1974, the Honourable Jeanne Sauvé, who was then Minister of State for Science and Technology, announced that her ministry "will be responsible for the development of a science policy framework against which individual policies can be viewed" and that a science budget display "will be used for the evaluation of departmental and agency

budgetary proposals for scientific activity". The Minister added that "MOSST will evaluate these proposals prior to final consideration and approval by Treasury Board and publish annually a report analyzing federal expenditures on science and technology." The committee feels that it should scrutinize this report and consider how the new system of evaluation works.

Six eventful years have passed since the Special Committee of the Senate on Science Policy completed its public hearings. These hearings were limited by several factors. Canadians were not aware of the importance of science policy, and they did not fully perceive the specific issues involved. The data regarding expenditures on scientific activities were very scarce, and those then existing were very much out of date. In general, the members of the committee and the community of Canadians directly concerned with science and technology were coming to a major public discussion of the subject for the first time.

In the intervening years, not only have we all learned much more about science policy and the nature of its issues, but many related developments have taken place. The past six years have seen profound changes, not only in Canada but in most parts of the globe. Many of the changes of the past few years place a new and heavy burden on science policy making. New needs require changing priorities and new programs. Parliamentarians and government officials have new and challenging responsibilities. Probably the most visible and threatening changes involve future energy resources. The growing worldwide attempt to cope with this must take account of the increasing concern over environmental degradation and the depletion of non-renewable resources.

Other science policy issues arise from the many other changes or shifts of public perception. To name only a few: food needs and nutrition; climate changes and weather modifications; alternative technologies versus established technologies; the safety of nuclear power plants; resources within and under the oceans; genetic modifications; human and environmental protection. With these problem areas are associated opportunities and threats. Hence, conflict is unavoidable and consensus making is required for any action to be taken in response to the new and changing matrix of problems. Lack of concerted action in the face of problems does not avoid future changes. It simply results in our future being shaped by force and accident rather than reflection and choice. We need a policy for accident, not a policy by accident.

Realizing new policy responsibilities is not equivalent to changing policies and formulating new objectives and programs. The gap between the perception of new policy needs and the development of, say, satisfactory technology delivery systems is worrying and frustrating public spokesmen, parliamentarians and government officials the world over. Canadians are not alone in having to face the problems of bridging this gap. Members of the committee