

*Oral Questions***RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT****FUNDING FOR NATURAL SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING
RESEARCH COUNCIL**

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Science and Technology. It concerns funding to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. I would refer him to the action taken recently by his colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, who followed the example set by the previous Clark government and significantly increased the funding to the Medical Research Council.

I should like to ask the Minister of State for Science and Technology whether he will follow the same course with regard to NSERC. Can he say when he will increase the meagre funding, from the 11 per cent increase already allocated, to something approaching the 35 per cent increase that had been allocated to NSERC by the previous Conservative government?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, the hon. member and the House should know that, as a government, we confirmed the very significant increases for NSERC funding for the first year of their five-year plan. We have re-endorsed the principles of that five-year plan, and the funding for the subsequent years is now before the cabinet. I expect that in about a month's time I will be able to confirm the increased expenditures for the NSERC funding for the subsequent years.

Miss MacDonald: Madam Speaker, I am sure the minister knows that what I am trying to do is to offer all the assistance possible to get that funding through. That is why I referred him to what his colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, has been able to achieve with a little bit of prompting. Perhaps he will be able to do the same.

I would point out to him that he, in fact, told us in committee a month ago, that he would be in a position by mid-April to indicate to the House the new funding quotas for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. Now he says it will be the middle of May. I am afraid he will go on and on putting it off, leaving the research councils in a state of uncertainty both about their funding and about the five-year plan. Can he give us an absolute guarantee that mid-May will be the deadline by which he does increase the funding to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and that it will be an increase amounting to the 300 per cent that has been allocated to MRC?

Mr. Roberts: Madam Speaker, I recognize the hon. member's conviction about the importance of these increases, and I welcome the urgency she attaches to them and the urging she is providing to me and my colleagues. I hope she will continue with those efforts to support us.

Miss MacDonald: I will.

Mr. Roberts: Clearly, I cannot give absolute guarantees until the spending has been confirmed by cabinet. It is true that about a month ago I said I expected to be able to do so about this time. I regret that there has been a further slippage due to factors beyond my control. As the hon. member knows, periodically the government assesses the outstanding claims against expenditures in terms of the amount of funds available. All that I can assure the hon. member is that I expect that process to take place about mid-May and that therefore I will be able to confirm at that time what the increased funding will be. I cannot give absolute guarantees for an event before my colleagues take part in that decision.

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PUBLIC SERVICE**IMPLEMENTATION OF LAMBERT AND D'AVIGNON
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Mr. Jim Schroder (Guelph): Madam Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Would the minister inform the House how he intends to implement the recommendations in the Lambert and D'Avignon reports to increase the efficiency of the government and reduce excessive government spending?

● (1440)

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): I welcome that question, Madam Speaker. As at least some hon. members will have noted, last week I deposited in the House a report entitled "Accountable Management" which is intended to bring Members of Parliament up to date on where we are with respect to the implementation of the various recommendations which have come forward, both from the Lambert Commission and the D'Avignon Committee.

Some of the highlights include areas such as the new expenditure management program which exists, and is sometimes called the envelope system.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The awful system?

Mr. Johnston: We have also deposited in this House, which is of particular significance, a new form of the estimates.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Johnston: As all members know, that is a pivotal recommendation to render better accountability of government—

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Are you a pivotal minister?

Mr. Johnston:—and to bring these matters to the attention of parliamentarians. I am disappointed I have not had the commentary from members that I would like. Therefore, I would encourage all members of the House on both sides to look very carefully at the pilot projects which have been tabled in the House and referred to the public accounts committee. I welcome input from all members, Madam Speaker.