

Oral Questions

that NRC would experience once more the crisis it experienced in 1990-91 with cutbacks in personnel, cutbacks in research programs and a complete demoralization of the scientific staff there.

My question to the minister is as follows. What kind of research and development policy is it that would decimate one of our most prestigious research institutions and will he indicate to this House that the government will embark on a plan to ensure that the crisis the president of NRC predicts will not happen?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister for Science and Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Madam Speaker, my hon. friend is taking licence with what the head of the NRC said the other day. He did not use the word decimate. He did not use any of the verbs the hon. member has just used. This government has cut back grants and contributions and cross-government programs 10 per cent here, 15 per cent there, sometimes even more in some operating programs.

When it comes to science those levels of cutbacks have not happened. In fact the cutbacks have not occurred. We are going to have more than zero per cent growth in contributions. They are going to be 1.5 per cent in the coming year.

This shows there is a preference in this government for helping research and development, for helping science and technology, plus the IRAP announcement which is an important part of the National Research Council.

Eighty-three million new dollars will go to the NRC to administer the IRAP for the next five years. This is an immense increase. Instead of having 225 officers in the field bringing discoveries in the laboratory to industry and to commercial prospect we will now have 300.

These are things the government has done in a time of restraint. They underline far better than any rhetoric the commitment of the government to science and technology.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—St. Clair): Madam Speaker, every time I ask this minister a question about any particular issue on science, he just shops through the market to find anything he can find without answering the question.

The fact of the matter is the president of the National Research Council said that the situation in 1990-91

would be repeated if there is not change and that was a crisis.

The next question I want to ask is a supplementary for the same minister. In view of the fact that the parliamentary committee also praised the National Centres of Excellence Program, proposed that it be continued and that its funding be increased, we now hear from a variety of sources that there are plans to cut the funding from \$250 million to \$125 million.

I would like the minister to explain how the government can justify cutting by half the funding for a program that represents the most significant and successful new initiative by this government.

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister for Science and Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): I thank my hon. friend for the compliment because when we brought in the National Centres of Excellence, his party and he in particular fought the program. They said it would be better to give the money to the granting councils and let them decide where this money should go.

Instead we said something very creative. We said that we want to identify the 15 most excellent research opportunities in Canada, link them up with industry, build these centres and make them strong. We put that program in place beginning in 1989 and it is now under review. The parliamentary committee has complimented it and feels the program is working well. It thinks some changes should be made.

We are doing a peer review as well. These are the people who are the real scientists in the field. People in industry are doing their review of this program. The Prime Minister is committed to this program which will remain permanent. Whether we can maintain the same level of funding or not is a difficult question. Government is having to cut back. We are inviting the provinces to participate more than they are. We are inviting industry to participate more than it is. We will soon see what the level of funding will be.

• (1430)

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—St. Clair): Madam Speaker, the hon. minister comes rather late to his expertise in science. I hope he will not again repeat the unmitigated falsehood that this member opposed the National Centres of Excellence Program. I did not.