

Government Orders

to increase Canadian research to the level of other countries?

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I regret that I cannot allow that question right now.

When we get into 10-minute speeches and 5 minutes for questions and comments, and when there are long comments lasting two, three or four minutes, I cannot get in any more than one questioner and one rebuttal.

The Chair recognizes the hon. member for Calgary Southwest on debate.

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today. I notice that the motion put forward by the hon. member for Ottawa South condemns the government for failure to support the National Research Council, which simply is not true.

I want to make it perfectly clear that no new cuts have been imposed upon the NRC. What the opposition is talking about relates to adjustments due to the creation of the Canadian Space Agency. In fact, the NRC budget without space program funds was \$400 million in the last Main Estimates. It is \$402 million in the upcoming fiscal year. There are no new cuts imposed upon the NRC.

The projected personnel reductions are as a result of previously announced restraint measures, something which the NRC has known about for several years. In fact, if I recall correctly, it was 1986 when that was announced.

The NRC has tabled some new and exciting programs and initiatives that it is going to undertake in its long range, five-year plan. All research programs change and evolve with time. Some research programs reach maturity; others develop in directions that are actually outside the mandate of the NRC; and others may shrink to a sort of sub-critical size or be phased out as resources at the NRC are reallocated and new initiatives are developed. It is very important that we constantly be aware of the new initiatives.

The NRC is committed to basic research. I notice that the parliamentary secretary gave some interesting statistics. I just want to repeat that out of the total amount of funding that this government puts into R and D, 14 per cent of it goes to basic research. As the parliamentary secretary just said, France is the only other industrialized

country that is ahead of that, and only by 1 per cent. I would say that some of us here might recognize that France has a socialist type of government, so 14 per cent is nothing to be ashamed of. Look at Germany with 12 per cent, Japan with 7 per cent, and the U.S. with 4 per cent. This government is committed to supporting basic research.

Canada today, like other industrialized nations, is facing scientific and technical changes. The NRC remains as committed today as it always has been to excellence. It is committed to remaining an organization where world-class research is performed by world-class scientists and engineers in world-class facilities. This means choosing carefully the areas where we intend to be excellent so as not to spread ourselves too thinly with the resources that we have available. I believe that even with new resources we would be obligated to review every activity that takes place with a critical eye to guarantee scientific merits and to ascertain the relevance of Canada's needs in terms of what is needed out there today. Whether the NRC is the best place to do basic research or whether it is best done in the universities, everybody has to be reviewing constantly what is in the best needs of Canada.

Excellence is essential for all our programs, but excellence alone is not enough. Our research must also be relevant and mesh well with other NRC activities. One of the best ways for NRC to choose priorities and increase the impact of limited resources is through increased collaboration and increased communication with its clients, with government officials in the departments such as our new Department of Industry, Science and Technology. Let us just state here that this department has received world acclaim and we have a minister for science.

This government recognizes that if we are to be competitive in this global trading world this country must improve its science and technology, which is just the way we are going.

The federal government has played a leadership role in developing Canada's competitiveness by investing heavily in the S and T area. The support the federal government gives to research and development is significant and compares favourably to public sector non-defence spending of its major international competitors.