

involved in forest fires. In that respect, I want to refer to two specific cases that arose from the experience in the Province of New Brunswick.

One might say that I have a good news case and a bad news case, Mr. Speaker. After all, our real concern is the human element. We can talk about equipment and about the economy, but our concern in this Chamber and indeed in the Parliament of Canada must be for the humans involved in these situations.

Nancy Thompson said that she left her home because she could not stand to watch as the fire approached. She returned later to find out that her home had been preserved through the efforts of the St. George Fire Department. This is very typical of the sort of thing we saw depicted in the media and elsewhere regarding the efforts made by those volunteers.

I would like to place on record at least one case of a home being saved by the specific efforts of the St. George Fire Department from Charlotte County, New Brunswick. I would like to point out that effort as being only typical of the kind of efforts that were made. However, I think it is worth-while to be specific about these efforts lest we get caught up in a sea of rhetoric and forget that there are real people helping real people in these situations. That is one situation in which the help resulted in the saving of a family home.

On the other side of the coin, let me refer to the case of Ken Banks who is described as a 50-year-old carpenter and part-time farmer. He lost everything he owned as fire raced through his neighbourhood near Burton last week. Mr. Banks's home was located in Upper Gagetown, which was at the heart of the most serious of the fires, and he lost everything. When Mr. Banks says he lost everything, he means everything. He was wiped out completely. He lost his home, and the woodlot from which he intended to get his winter firewood and earn money for the future was lost totally.

This brings me to the most difficult part of this debate, and that is, liability and responsibility for the forest fires. Mr. Ken Banks lived in the area in which the fire might be attributed to the actions of the military base at Camp Gagetown. I would not rise in the House of Commons to suggest that anyone at Camp Gagetown had done anything of a negligent nature, but the fact is that the *Toronto Globe and Mail* and other newspapers and media sources in Canada have made that allegation. It has not been denied and appears to have been confirmed that the fire was started as a result of activity at Camp Gagetown.

We in the House of Commons and the Government of Canada represent all the people of Canada. We do not have to defend or attack any particular interest. We can be fair judges of the situation, and all indications are that there may be a responsibility for this fire. If that is the case, I urge the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Nielsen) and the Government of Canada to acknowledge very quickly that responsibility and to take very expeditious action to remedy the harm that has been done. I am sure there is not one Canadian who would

S.O. 29

want to reject the idea of responsibility to an individual like Mr. Ken Banks who lost his home if there is any basis for liability on the part of the national Government.

This does not mean a condemnation of the Canadian Forces or anyone in the Forces. It is simply recognition of a fact of life. Harm has been done. If it can be compensated by the Government of Canada representing all the people of Canada, let us take that course of action. Let us take it quickly and let us mitigate the losses.

What we learned from these experiences is to look to the future with the resolve to correct the difficulties of the past and to make the forests of Canada safer places for the benefit of all Canadians. If in the course of that process we have to recognize that some wrongful act has taken place in the past, let us do that. Our future is in the forests but our future is also in the people and they are the ones who require the protection as well as the forests.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Argenteuil—Papineau):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity this evening to take part in the emergency debate on the tragic situation confronting Canadian men and women in the Maritimes. I say tragic, because it takes at least 30 years for a forest to recover from the disastrous effects of a forest fire. This evening, speaking on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau and on behalf of all Quebecers, I would like to express my feelings of sympathy to our fellow citizens in the Maritime provinces in these hours of anxiety and tell them that we share their concern.

I also wish to congratulate my hon. friend from Fundy—Royal (Mr. Corbett) for moving the motion for this debate. I think this is an example of what can be done under our new parliamentary reform, which gives the Speaker a chance to allow emergency debates for a limited period of time. I think it is the best way to deal with a topic as important as the one we are considering today.

Mr. Speaker, it is too bad that the Maniwaki Forest Fire Research Centre, announced by the Progressive Conservative Government in November 1985, has not yet opened its doors, because the new technology would help communities and firefighters to cope with this kind of problem. I believe our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has on several occasions mentioned how important our forests are to him, and he was the first person to endorse this project which at the end of May 1986 is now nearing completion.

[English]

The staffing for the centre is well advanced. A chief and three computer programmers were hired on March 1, 1986, and these people are now undergoing intensive training at the *Centre de la Société de Conservation de l'Outaouais* and at the CFS Petawawa National Forestry Institute. A search is also under way for an electronic engineer to deal with lightning detection systems, weather radar and radio communications. It is expected that this position will be filled this month.