

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is a beautiful place. As well as being one of the most beautiful places, I think it is probably the cultural capital of Canada, being home to both Sidney Crosby and the Trailer Park Boys.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the motion put forward by the distinguished member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

The member for Westmount--Ville-Marie is one of the most distinguished new parliamentarians. In fact, he is a hero to many Canadians, as the first Canadian in space, and his long history in the navy and the scientific community. I commend him for putting this motion forward.

In fact, even my beautiful 12-year-old daughter, Emma, was asked to do a science project the other day and she is going to do the science project on the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. I want to thank him not only for putting this motion forward but for actually getting my daughter interested in politics just a little tiny bit.

Since I was elected back in 2004 first on the government side and now in opposition, post-secondary education and research have been very close to my heart.

I had the opportunity early on to be the chair of the Liberal caucus committee on post-secondary education. I have worked with members like the member for Halifax West and senators like Senator Wilfred Moore, Senator Terry Mercer and many others.

My concern is that the Conservative government is dramatically failing the research community. It is a concern I had when the Conservatives were elected as government and it is a concern that continues to this day. I was worried that they would roll back the clock on research, or even worse, start to pick and choose the type of research they would support, which is a very dangerous thing to do. It will not come as a surprise to many that is exactly what they did. On both counts I think they have lowered the bar and we find ourselves in the situation where research and innovation in Canada is threatened, notwithstanding how the Conservatives stand up in this place and other places and bluster about all the money they put into it, but we have heard that before in other areas. I think of areas such as literacy where they talk about the great investments they have made, but when we go across this country it is hard to find them on the ground.

The Conservative government's decision to cut support for research punishes the tremendous efforts of researchers across the country, many of whom came back to Canada or came to Canada in the first place because of the huge investments made, some \$12 billion in investments, by the previous Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin. These investments were transformative and they were the right thing to do.

In the mid-1990s this country was just coming out of the pounding it took at the hands of the Conservative Mulroney government. The funding agencies were in an awful lot of trouble.

I remember being very involved. In fact, I was the president of the Heart and Stroke Foundation in Nova Scotia. The funding that we were getting from the Medical Research Council was diminishing almost to nothing. Researchers who were doing important work were coming to us and we could only fund a minute percentage of that research because the MRC was no longer funding that important research.

It was in the mid-1990s after cleaning up the deficit and debt of the previous government that we saw the creation of this incredible research community in Canada, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Genome Canada, the creation of thousands of research chairs and the incredible increase in funding for the granting councils.

CIHR had an immediate impact. I could see it. I am not a scientist, nor am I a medical person, but I could see the impact of CIHR and the leveraging of money that CIHR created under the distinguished and effective leadership of Alan Bernstein.

These significant investments led cutting-edge research, including the development of the BlackBerry, which some members of the House use on occasion.

I recall a wonderful evening last October after the election. I was invited to a dinner in Toronto by Paul Genest, a great Canadian, and his association, the Council of Ontario Universities. They were honouring former prime minister Jean Chrétien for the work that he did on innovation, research and education.

People like Jeffrey Simpson have written about the investments that were made in research in this country at the end of the last century and early in this century by the governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, as well as John Manley, with the support of Kevin Lynch and other bureaucrats who saw the need for Canada to reinvest in its research community. Those investments in many ways turned Canada around. We did in fact reverse the brain drain. Every community in this country that has a university, community college or polytechnical institute can point to researchers, to work that is being done in their communities because of those investments.

In my own area of Atlantic Canada, it was accompanied by an investment through ACOA in the Atlantic innovation fund. The federal government could see that in an area like Atlantic Canada it was very difficult to get venture capital or find funding partners for the commercialization of research. It created the Atlantic innovation fund, which put some \$300 million into research and innovation that otherwise could not have happened in Atlantic Canada.

That is the kind of leadership Paul Genest recognized last October when he invited Mr. Chrétien to speak to that group. Mr. Chrétien, in his wonderful way, said it was not done because it was popular, as there probably are not that many votes in research and innovation, but it is the right thing to do and if we talk about productivity, it is the best thing to do.

During the Republican years of George Bush, funding for research and innovation was generally tossed aside. Funding was not only cut but it was banned for important research into stem cells, for example, although just today President Obama reversed that policy. He did so because he knows that this type of research will save lives and give hope to American citizens.

While Republicans were cutting funding for research and innovation beginning in 2000, the Liberal government of the day was investing heavily, to the tune of some \$12 billion between 1998 and 2005. The good news is that we reversed the brain drain. The problem, as we all now know, is we have the spectacle of the Conservative government cutting funding for research and innovation and cutting funding to the granting councils. The Conservatives are putting at risk the significant gains Canada has made over the last decade.

Let us compare this to the Americans. The new president at his inauguration sent the clear message that research and innovation are to be a cornerstone of his administration. He has

allocated billions of dollars, enormous funds into research and innovation. It is a little embarrassing how out of touch, how shortsighted and narrow-minded the government in Ottawa is, and the sooner that the government is defeated at the right opportunity, the better.

It is no secret that there are elements within the Conservative government that are probably, to be generous, a little suspicious of science, and I would say, particularly suspicious of social scientists. Why? The Conservatives are intent on turning back the clock on research and academic study. Why? Because the type of scholarly work done by our social scientists, those involved in the humanities, tend to contradict the views of the Conservative government. I wonder if the cutbacks to those researchers and their work is the result of the conclusion that the government knows it is wrong on issues like child care, justice and women's issues, to name a few.

Every month or so I have the honour of sponsoring a breakfast for the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences which works with SSHRC, the granting council. I am very pleased that for the last number of breakfasts there have been representatives from all parties. At the breakfast a social scientist talks to us about his findings. It is a provocative session, followed by questions and answers. We have talked about everything from marriage to money, anything people could think of.

The topic this week is "Political Minefields: Religion in post-secular society". Dr. Paul Bramadat, who is the director of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria, will lead us in that discussion. Mr. Speaker, I invite you personally to come to that breakfast. I will buy you breakfast. It is free anyway, but please come. I would be honoured to buy you and any other member of the House breakfast.

I have a concern that the Conservatives view facts as a nuisance. I think they put their ideology above independent researchers and above conclusions that are based on fact. They put politics before people.

Just last week we heard that the Minister of State for Science and Technology exploded and lost control in a meeting with the Canadian Association of University Teachers. What triggered that reaction? What would cause the minister and a staff member to tell those visitors that they should shut up? Was it because the university reps had the temerity to tell the Conservative minister that cuts to the granting councils were wrong-headed, that the squeezing out of the independent science adviser, Dr. Arthur Carty, was a cause for concern? The government has got it wrong again.

It is my view that the Conservatives love power but hate government. They would like to support research that they can control. That is not how things should be done.

This past weekend there was an article in the Ottawa Citizen which talked about science, and there have been a number of articles recently. Members of the government will say, "The member does not know what he is talking about. We put \$5.2 billion into this stuff". There are an awful lot of smart people who are looking at that and saying that is hogwash.

In fact, the day after the budget came down, I received a letter from somebody who is very involved in science and research at Dalhousie University. The note, which he sent to the department, stated, "Hello, everybody. With the budget announcement Tuesday, I have had the chance to digest a bit more information about the impact of the proposal on research. In brief, it is not good!!!! The government science and technology strategy....As you can see from the table below, the streamlining"--he is talking about the granting councils--"to improve

effectiveness is a not so subtle code for cuts to tri-council funding to achieve new programs. That is the really, really bad news. What all this doublespeak means is that over \$87 million will be cut from granting councils from the 2011-12 fiscal year, that the government is cloaking budget cuts in the language of new programs to support post-secondary education”.

What we see again is what the government is so good at, which is pitting one group against another group. The Conservatives do it with regions. They do it with income groups. The tax cuts have helped one group at the expense of another. Everything is boutique; everything is for one person over somebody else. That is not how it should be.

Research and innovation is too important to play around with. Social sciences and humanities research is particularly important. Research can give us amazing perspectives. A scientist can look through a microscope and examine a cell in a heart. A social scientist can study a group of people and peer into the soul of a nation. What they are finding when they peer into the soul of our nation is that the people of Canada are governed by a government that is not up to the task. That is the problem in research, in innovation, in technology, and that has to change very soon.