

# NRC research vital

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The National Research Council's goal of using science to boost Canada's productivity and competitiveness is laudable, as its president, John McDougall, testified yesterday at the House of Commons Industry Committee.

Involving industry early on in research where possible is expected to increase the commercialization of discoveries.

As Canada's national organization of physicists, we advocate for policies that encourage business innovation, including greater co-operation between industry and universities.

We urge caution in the restructuring of NRC, as did the Jenkins panel on federal research and development.

Great care must be taken so that Canada will not lose the capacity for research and innovation that has built up at NRC over many years.

The example of directing research efforts at NRC to improve crops, cited by Mr. McDougall, may be of great value to the Canadian economy.

Yet were it not for a long term research program to develop a better rapeseed beginning in the 1950s, we might not have the \$15 billion per year canola industry or the expertise to pursue further crop improvements.

Mandating the NRC to only do short term research for which businesses are willing to pay would put at risk the NRC's capabilities to carry out long-term research where outcomes are unforeseen, and research that informs sound public policy, as well as some of Canada's shared research facilities.

What will happen to our capacity to make scientific breakthroughs from long-term research that will lead to dramatic improvements in health care, computing, or information security, or to other advances that we can't imagine today?

What will happen to our capacity to conduct research to support public policy, such as observing oceans for pollution and the effects of a changing climate, testing innovative materials to qualify them for building codes, or developing measurement standards to accredit products?

What will happen to Canadian participation in international telescopes, or to facilities needed by a wide spectrum of Canadian researchers such as the Canadian Neutron Beam Centre or the National Ultrahigh-Field NMR Facility for Solids?

**NRC's vital capabilities must be preserved, whether by retaining them within NRC or transferring them to other organizations. Otherwise, Canada risks shutting the door on the next great Canadian innovation.**

**Gabor Kunstatter, President, Canadian Association of Physicists**

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