

# More jobs created with white coats than hard hats

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Former prime minister John Diefenbaker gave Canada its first Bill of Rights, set up the Royal Commission on Health Services, which resulted in the country's flagship social program, appointed its first francophone Governor General and was the first to connect the south with its Arctic region.

In spite of his record, however, Dief the Chief is best known for cancelling the Avro CF-105 Arrow, striking a near-death blow to Canada's aerospace industry while sending its scientists south, where they formed the bedrock of NASA.

John Pomeroy, one of Canada's most renowned scientists, is concerned he is about to witness history repeat. Although last week's budget had much to help universities and research institutes build more facilities, it had devastating cuts to research programs -- the kinds of programs that keep top scientists working and improve productivity.

Also last week, the U.S. government tabled laws that would see that country dramatically ramp up program spending for research, which will mean those scientists (it took more than a decade to attract them back north of the 49th parallel in an effort to bring up Canada's reputation as a scientific powerhouse) will have no shortage of jobs to go to.

But, like the space engineers and scientists that migrated south after Mr. Diefenbaker's 1959 decision, they won't likely be coming home any time soon. And the advances they will make in environmental protection, genomics, engineering and health will benefit Americans first and be bought back at top dollar by Canadians.

Mr. Pomeroy's not alone. Shock at the abysmal shortsightedness in last week's budget when it comes to support for front-line research has been ricocheting across campuses, research institutes, environmental organizations and even conservative think-tanks as Canadians begin to realize just how little they will get for the massive debt being logged by the Stephen Harper government.

"This is survival without any sense of direction," said Tom Flanagan, a former Conservative campaign chief and one of the prime minister's top advisers.

The government made it clear it was particularly interested in "shovel ready" projects, in its desire to stem the bleeding when it comes to job losses. It clearly had the blinders on when it chose the path Canada will follow, however.

It is one thing to create temporary hard-hat jobs and hope that whatever is built will be useful when the country comes out of this downturn. Money invested in research, however, not only goes to create proportionately more jobs -- most of it going to graduate students who earn so little they spend whatever they get -- but the work done provides the country with the technology, knowledge and human resources to improve productivity and create jobs for the long term.

For example, Tuesday's budget slashed funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Science, meaning work now being done on prairie droughts, monitoring mountain snow and glaciers and Arctic permafrost and freshwater will end in a year.

This means just as Canadians -- particularly people in Saskatchewan -- will be struggling to deal with the impact of climate change, the expertise to manage the change could be lost. To put that in perspective, the 2001-02 drought that hit this region cost an estimated \$61 billion and 41,000 jobs. The foundation's work was meant to help prepare for the next time, and to ensure the prairies have sustainable sources of water for irrigation and their cities.

The budget also had nothing for future Genome Canada projects, the Prairie office of which is in Saskatoon. This will mean the end to plans for one proposal to use genomics to improve children's health and another to improve livestock production. This means the health costs and the lost competitiveness in these two sectors could dog Canadians for a generation, particularly if the scientists who would have conducted this work decide to go where the grass is greener.

And speaking of greener, the budget also came up short in programs designed to stimulate growth in renewable energy. A \$1.5-billion program, for example, that provided a one-cent subsidy for each kilowatt hour a company received from renewable energy was set to expire in 2011 but has been so successful it will run out of money in weeks.

According to a Globe and Mail story, it isn't being renewed because government officials were looking for projects that would supply short-term stimulus and an environmental subsidy doesn't fit the bill. This even though there are at least 1,500 megawatts worth of projects ready for construction -- and the short-term stimulus that comes with that work -- the moment money is available.

The budget cuts an astounding \$148 million during the next three years from the granting councils, including the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the National Research Council. The government argues these cuts are to be made up by focusing on priorities and dumping the rest.

This is a mug's game, however.

In an editorial about Asia's economic woes, the British magazine The Economist points out trying to pull oneself from a recession simply by investing in bricks and mortar is not a long-term solution. Sooner or later this kind of investment becomes unaffordable and impossible to pay for unless the economy is put on a sustainable path.

That vision appears to have been lost on Ottawa.