

Government Orders

sion of people with the occupational and professional skills we need for Canada to prosper and grow.

We want to keep this program in place. We want it operating at peak efficiency. That is why we propose to amend Section 119(3) of the Immigration Act. Over the years, the maximum limit of funds allocated to finance this program has risen from an original \$3 million, through \$30 million, \$60 million and finally in 1986 to \$90 million. Few can deny that this money is well invested. Indeed, all past parliamentary reviews of this program have seen the wisdom of granting our request to continue its operation.

• (1130)

The Transportation Loan Program has never been a point of contention in the House. The beauty of this program is that, unlike many others, we get our money back. This is a loan program. The people who tap into the funds pay us back over a period of time and the repayment record is excellent. In recent days, however, so many people have turned to the program for assistance that the fund has been depleted. I would like to reiterate that the money is coming back to us, but the repayment rate, though consistent, is slow. The funds in the program are therefore not being replenished fast enough to meet the escalating demands. As of April 15, 1990 \$88.9 million in loans were outstanding. This has left us with only \$1.1 million before we reach our statutory limit.

The program's financial situation is such that we have had to curtail the loans being made through implementing a temporary priority approval system. Simply stated, the fact that the current limit is fixed by statute inhibits our ability to respond appropriately and rapidly to the needs of the people we serve. That is why we are asking that the limit be removed from the act and that it be set by regulation in the future. Doing so would enable the government to respond to increased demand for loans more quickly but just as openly.

I must emphasize that the Minister of Employment and Immigration will still have to report annually to the House on the number of loans made under the program and the amount of money remaining in the fund. Moreover, proposed changes to the limit would still be subject to the normal open regulatory process. In other words, while maintaining public review of proposed

changes to the funding limit, the amendments would give the government the necessary flexibility to quickly address the fluctuations in demand caused by the shifting ebb and flow of refugees and immigrants. We would not have to seek a legislative amendment each time there is a work load increase because of events such as those now taking place in eastern Europe.

As opposition critics and others will be aware, there are many approaching demands on these same funds. Canada agreed at a Geneva Convention in 1989 to help ease the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia by admitting 16,000 refugees over a three year period. Furthermore, the government is committed to sponsoring 13,000 convention refugees and designated class members in 1990. We have also indicated that there will be unlimited opportunities for private sponsorship of refugees selected abroad. We continue to encourage the private sponsorship of refugees and dependants and want to ensure through this program that such sponsorships are facilitated as quickly as possible.

The Transportation Loan Program has played a major role in helping refugees pay the cost of their medical examinations and travel to Canada. Without this program it is doubtful that Canada could have earned its enviable international reputation for the care and treatment of refugees.

It is also doubtful whether without this program Canada could meet its current international refugee commitments. If we are to live up to our commitments to the resettlement of refugees and the reunification of families, we need to ensure that Canada can respond quickly and effectively to the fluctuating international demands. That is what Bill C-77 is all about.

In conclusion, I commend it to the House and hope that speedy approval will allow us to get on with serving those people who most need our help.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be responding today to the bill tabled in the House, Bill C-77, on behalf of my colleagues of the national Liberal caucus.

First, the travel loans are a positive part of the over-all immigration program. In essence, those loans are available to landed immigrants, convention refugees and Canadian citizens who wish to help their family members