

*Government Orders*

This is sensible and sound management of very scarce and needed dollars. It would give the minister a target and goal and some parameters within which to operate. This limit would be considered by a proper authority, which is Parliament itself.

Someone running a business, a board of directors of a company, a school board, a union and even a household have to have some kind of budgetary parameters within which to operate. If there is an unlimited ability to overspend and to make errors in spending, two things happen. One is that the operation pretty soon does not operate on a sound fiscal basis and does not live within its means. The other is that money which is needed in other areas is simply not available because it has been wasted or not properly allocated in the area being considered.

I think that this is nothing but a very sensible, sound and modest way of ensuring that there is some accountability in the spending of the department under this bill. Under these new proposals we can effectively judge how well and how sensibly the program is being run.

Without this kind of accountability we lose a couple of things that are very important to sound management. One is the paper trail. There has to be some record kept of spending, where it has gone and why there has been overspending so that there can be a good assessment of how soundly things are being run. We also lose track of where the money is going. We do not want to do that. That is important not just because of some accounting fetish, but because money goes to people and the people who are entitled to the money need it and are entitled to know that is being well managed and put forward sensibly.

I urge the House to adopt this motion put forward by the Reform Party. It enhances the bill. It enhances the service to people and enhances our need to be accountable to the Canadian public.

**Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find it fascinating to be discussing Motion No. 7 because of what the Reform Party is advocating. It is advocating that the minister's discretion with respect to forgiving overpayments should be wiped away and this special kind of power given to the highest ranking officer.

• (1610)

**Mrs. Ablonczy:** No, that is not true. It should not be wiped away. It should be accountable.

**Mr. Dromisky:** —to forgiving.

Let me begin my discussion of this amendment by outlining briefly what it contains.

The Reform Party proposes that the minister should report to the House how much overpayment benefit money is forgiven each year. That is a simple request. The minister should make recommendations regarding how much he should be permitted to forgive in the upcoming year. The Reform Party believes that

the minister has a crystal ball and knows exactly how many cases are going to appear before him and his ministry. Therefore, he should be able to make such a judgment for the future 12 months.

Reform proposes that a parliamentary committee should set limits on how much may be forgiven in a year. Again we have to use the crystal ball. The proposal also suggests that no amount may be forgiven until the committee sets the yearly total and no amount may be forgiven once that total has been reached.

When I first heard the motion, I could hardly believe my ears. The Reform Party is supposed to be the party which believes that less government is better government. Yet that very same party introduced the motion which would add extra processes, extra time, extra layers of bureaucracy and extra costs to the administration of the old age security program. It really is amazing.

Motion No. 7 betrays the Reform Party's fixation on the minute details of the OAS program. Members opposite seek to micromanage the program and the minister at great cost and for no benefit whatsoever. It would like to have complete control over every minute detail, every tiny aspect of the entire program.

As usual, it is instructive to look at the facts surrounding the motion. It is also worth while to note that these facts are at the disposal of the Reform Party, as they are at the disposal of all members of the House.

The Minister of Human Resources Development currently forgives something less than \$1 million in old age security overpayments each year. As we have noted in debating other motions, the minister is responsible for that amount but does not have carte blanche to forgive overpayments. Certain conditions must exist before the overpayment can be forgiven.

As the old age security program pays benefits in the order of \$18.5 billion each year, the rate at which overpayments are forgiven is something in the order of five one-thousandths of one per cent of the benefits paid. In addition, the amounts are already reported to Parliament in the context of the annual main estimates and public accounts. I will repeat that for the benefit of Reform members. These amounts are already reported to Parliament in the context of the annual main estimates and public accounts. Hon. members already have the opportunity to examine all of the figures in depth.

The motion by the Reform Party would create a duplication of these processes, and to what gain? So that Reform members can micromanage the minister's use of his discretion to forgive overpayments which amount to something in the order of five one-thousandths of one per cent of the program's expenditures.

If the motion were adopted, it could lead to disaster. Imagine a committee setting a small limit on the amount which could be forgiven. If that amount of money were used up in eight months time, let us say, what would happen to the cases which occurred