

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.
And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

[Translation]

And the division bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 45(5)(a), the recorded division on the question now before the House stands deferred until 6:30 p.m. today, at which time the bells to call in the members will be sounded for not more than 15 minutes.

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• (1600)

[English]

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

The House resumed from May 8, consideration of Bill C-54, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act, the Canada pension plan, the Children's Special Allowances Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee; and of Motions Nos. 5, 6 and 7.

The Deputy Speaker: Because of circumstances, the hon. member for Calgary North has the floor.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on group No. 4, amendments to clause 23 of Bill C-54.

For Canadians watching the debate, I will repeat that the bill is an attempt to make the administration of some of the government social services programs more streamlined, a little more user friendly, so to speak. We think that is a good idea but there is real concern expressed in this group of motions about the accountability in the administration of these acts.

The Bloc has put forward two amendments to clause 23 and Reform has put forward one amendment to clause 23. In fact, that is the only amendment we have put forward on the entire bill.

The purpose of our amendment is to ensure accountability of the administration of these new rules and procedures. We think it is right and proper that our citizens have access to these programs in a way that is not unduly bureaucratic and which removes as much red tape as possible. We are also very concerned that it also removes the accountability of the department and the administrators of the program from the people because it removes needed accountability to Parliament.

We believe the amendment we are suggesting to the bill and to clause 23 specifically would make the system more accountable. We think they are very modest and sensible proposals. We have not put forward a number of amendments but we think the issue of accountability is so key and so necessary that we felt the amendment we put forward ought to be seriously considered and passed by the House.

The amendment we have put forward is set out in today's Order Paper on page 17 under Motion No. 7.

Essentially the motion calls for the minister to be required to make a report to the House every year within 30 days of the beginning of the fiscal year. The report would tally the overpayments under these programs, particularly CPP and OAS and the amount of the overpayments. At the very least, the minister and his department should be accountable to the House and therefore, to the Canadian people we represent.

The House should know exactly how much the overpayment is because it really identifies administrative error, waste and inefficiency. If overpayments are being made, clearly the department is not doing its job very well. Overpayments, of course, very properly suggest these are payments over and above what should be made.

It is necessary because the dollars available to assist people in need under programs are becoming more scarce, with the possibility of CPP going broke in the next few years. It is very important that the dollars available actually reach the people who are entitled to them. If dollars are going to people who are not entitled to them, then clearly some of the difficulties these programs are in will hit hardest the people who do need those moneys.

Therefore, we think right after the beginning of the fiscal year, the minister should give a report to Parliament through the operating committee, of the administrative error that has taken place in the last fiscal year.

• (1605)

It is all very well for the minister to report the overpayment and the errors that have been made by his department, but then what happens? The report will then be considered by the appropriate committee and the committee will then decide to what level the minister may have leeway to overpay for the next year.

For example, if the department has made overpayments under these programs of, say, \$3 million the year before, the parliamentary committee may say to the department: "This is simply unacceptable. We will make you accountable by putting a cap of only \$1 million on the errors and overpayments you can make next year. We think that is plenty of room for error and we want you to operate in that range". The committee then will decide how much margin for error that particular department can operate under.