

Access to Information

to my constituent is if he legally changed his name. Can you imagine anything more ridiculous than a citizen being asked to change his name so that the computer can issue him a new number? What a ludicrous situation! Can you imagine this young man at a family gathering where his mother says: "This is Bill Smith, Tom Smith, Joe Smith and Mary Smith, but this is Bobby Brown because he cannot get along with the computer program and they cannot issue two social insurance numbers"!

We had quite a little time with that, Mr. Speaker. I checked with the official several times, made notes on his comments, and finally, through a stroke of luck, we found that the chap who was fraudulently using my constituent's name was in jail in Woodstock. Why was he there? He had been working in a gas station and when a customer came in for gasoline, say \$10 worth, if the customer paid by credit card this man would carefully tear off the customer's copy, leaving the carbon in place, then he would change the zero to a five so that it now read \$15. He would then take \$5 out of the till, the till would balance, and he would be \$5 in pocket. Well, eventually the police caught up with him and threw him in jail. We found him by running his name through the RCMP computer and up came a set of fingerprints. We then ran those through the computer and up came a different name. That is how we found out who he was.

I then went up to the jail and interviewed this individual. He was fantastic as far as numbers were concerned; I never met a man like him. He repeated my constituent's social insurance number, which he was using, backward and forward. He did the same with his driver's licence number. He had an unbelievable memory for numbers. I asked him what he was going to do when he got out of jail. He said he was just going to go down to the post office and order another social number, go to the records department in Toronto and get another driver's licence, and go to the necessary department and get another birth certificate and start all over again. So he was going to continue to use this young man's identification.

I came back to Ottawa and spoke to the minister in charge. He said there was nothing he could do. I spoke to the Minister of National Revenue, the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien), and they said there was nothing they could do. Finally I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) if a citizen had to comply with this computer program in order to get this matter sorted out, and he said of course not. It was only the pressure of editorial writers across the country that really got this thing out in the open. Every major newspaper in Canada ran an editorial on it and the pressure was really on. Jokingly I said to the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) one day in the House, when we were awaiting a vote, that if he ever had trouble with his social insurance number, he should come to me and I would sort it out. He said that they had talked about it in cabinet and that instructions went out to get that matter settled.

● (1730)

Here is what happened. I had a meeting with the minister and his officials. They wanted me to attend the minister's office. I am a fledgling Member of Parliament, so I said that I

would not go to the minister's office because I would be standing in front of the minister and all his officials. I told them that if they wanted to settle this matter, they could come to my office. I wanted to sit behind the desk and have them stand out in front. The parliamentary secretary, who is now the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacGuigan), said that the minister would not come to my office. I said that he did not have to come, that his officials could appear. This is exactly what happened. They all appeared. They brought a secretary, their legal advisers and the deputy minister. I was sitting behind the desk and they were out in front.

I want to say that it was quite a difference because I was more or less sitting in the driver's seat, so to speak. First of all, the chap at central records denied outright that he had even told me that my constituent would have legally to change his name. But I had made various notations as to the date, the times, the questions I had asked and so forth. I folded them up, gave them to him and said, "Put them in your scrapbook; I realize that what you have to do now is to save your job, and that you will not admit anything". Finally the deputy minister said that the only way this could be solved would be to change the act. They expected that I would say that I did not want them to go to all that trouble, but I said, "That is the very least I will accept; you must change the act".

So it began, and 18 months later, with an election in between, I finally received a new social insurance number for this young man and gave it to him as a Christmas present. It was the beginning of a new year and a new life for him, but he had gone through hell for five years because of the intransigence of the bureaucracy of government. People were saying that this could not be done, and the ministers were saying that they did not want to become involved. No one would move, but thank God for the police, for the RCMP and others who helped me. We finally got the job done.

Let me conclude by saying that after we had agreed to all this, the minister's executive assistant wrote a letter to *The Globe and Mail* trying to take credit for it. Can you imagine that? We replied to it, and I think he was let go shortly after that because it was a shabby trick. He even said that the minister's officials had found this dastardly individual who was fraudulently using my constituent's social insurance number, name and identity, in jail in Woodstock, when in fact they had not. I went so far as to check the visitors' record of the jail to be sure that I was right on that point. Certainly no one had been there from the government, from the RCMP or anyone else, until I had visited the individual and raised the matter on the floor of the House of Commons.

I thought this would be a worth-while contribution to Bill C-43. I know my colleagues on this side have laboured hard and long on the bill. It is not everything that we want, but it is a beginning. We will certainly support it, and we hope that at some later date we will have an opportunity to amend it and see that it is improved further. I wanted to put on the record what can go wrong when bureaucrats become insensitive to citizens and the difficulties they have with simple matters such as assigning a number to an individual. It is a tragedy. This