

Oral Questions

responsibility here in Canada? Can he say whether the Government of Canada has received requests for such assurances and, if so, what response has been given?

● (1420)

The ham-handed, insensitive statements of the Secretary of State have caused grave concern and alarm across the country that the Liberal Party is trying to use this for partisan ends. I ask the Prime Minister to repudiate that, along with the Secretary of State.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I know of no such representations made to me or to my office, but I will naturally inquire. I am a thousand per cent certain that the Palace would not make such a request of me because their knowledge of the Constitution seems to be better than that of the Leader of the Opposition. They know that a sitting Prime Minister cannot undertake to set a date for an election which might hypothetically be called after he has departed the job of Prime Minister. As far as the Vatican is concerned, I would venture to say they would have the same knowledge of the Constitution. I cannot give the guarantee. If I were asked, I could not answer anything differently to either the Vatican or the Palace, and I am sure they will not ask.

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NATIONAL REVENUE

TRAINING OF DEPARTMENT'S AUDITING STAFF

Mr. Chris Speyer (Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. The Income Tax Act is arguably the most complex Act that Parliament has passed. One of the main criticisms which the task force has heard from accountants and lawyers is that the auditors for Revenue Canada are ill-equipped to do their job because they have not been properly trained. Indeed, many times they demonstrate their incompetence. I wish to read to the Minister from a letter I received from a senior auditor of Revenue Canada. He told me this:

The total time allocated for training is hopelessly meagre. It is less than 10 per cent of what the major accounting firms consider necessary to keep their staffs current.

Does the Minister accept the criticism that there is a lack of training in the Department? Does he accept the criticism that there ought to be more chartered accountants to deal with these matters? Does he accept the criticism that the most senior auditors deal with the big firms, and the most inexperienced deal with the small business people? Does the Minister have some concern with respect to those matters?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, in concluding, the Hon. Member asked whether I was concerned about this criticism. Of course I am concerned, very much so. However, I may remind the Hon. Member that one of our primary concerns is to focus special attention on the

training given our staff, not only auditors but all personnel in the Department.

[English]

ANSWERS GIVEN TO TELEPHONED INQUIRIES

Mr. Chris Speyer (Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows that millions of taxpayers are now filing their returns. He also knows that many taxpayers do not have accountants. What they do is telephone their district tax office. One of the legitimate criticisms is that the people answering the phones do not know what they are talking about. They are giving bad advice to the taxpayers. It was reported in *The Toronto Star* yesterday that 40 per cent of the answers given were proven to be incorrect. Does the Minister understand that the people answering the phones and giving advice to taxpayers are, by and large, incompetent as a result of a lack of training, and what exactly is he going to do about it?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the Hon. Member's conclusion that the people answering the telephone are incompetent. I do not think the Hon. Member has his facts straight.

I think he should bear in mind that when questions are asked, the person answering them must know all the facts. It is extremely difficult in most cases, in specific cases or circumstances, to know all the facts.

We are concerned in my Department about this result. In any case, the Hon. Member was able to read the comments of the Director or Supervisor of this particular group. However, I want to give the Hon. Member, the House and Canadian taxpayers the assurance that the group that answers telephone requests is regularly tested by the supervisors. They also analyze the kind of questions they are asked, and regularly improve their ability to answer taxpayers' questions satisfactorily.

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● (1425)

[English]

FINANCE

HOUSING MORTGAGE INTEREST RATES

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance and deals with an issue which is on the minds of tens of thousands of Canadians, and that is the renegotiation of an existing mortgage, or the negotiation of a new mortgage for a first-time home buyer. The people of Canada heard earlier this week that the Mortgage Bankers Association of the United States is now predicting mortgage rates in the 14 per cent to 15 per cent range, and Canadians know that the Minister of Finance feels that Canadian rates must track or be greater than American