

Oral Questions

to develop a simple, one page registration form and businesses are now registering.

I can let the House know that because of the simplicity factors that this government is committed to that over 200,000 businesses have already registered in the last couple of weeks. The registrations are pouring in with no complaints.

Therefore I can only conclude that since there are no alternatives and no suggestions coming from the other side of the House, at least we can depend on the business community to help us simplify the system the best we can.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Finance.

Yesterday in the House the Minister of Finance admitted that he is making changes to the GST in private, without consulting either the members of the House or those who will be directly affected.

The Minister of National Revenue has just said that the Minister of Finance and he are consulting. It took an unelected Senate hearing to make public what the government is considering.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business confirmed this morning that the government refused to show them its proposed changes. What kind of consultation is this? Why does the government not consult with those who will be directly affected? Why will it not listen to the 80 per cent of Canadians who say scrap this tax?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of a more open process of tax reform that any government in the history of Canada has ever conducted.

Let me take my hon. friend back. We first started talking about sales tax reform in 1986. I have the document here that refers to it. I have the white paper of June, 1987. I have the technical paper of August, 1989.

Mr. Gauthier: Order.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): It is a document of the House of Commons. Surely, I can hold that up, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gauthier: You are demonstrating.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): We had draft legislation in early October of 1989. We had the committee

hearings of the House of Commons that went all last fall. We brought in the final legislation in February of this year, after we had made a number of changes that related to the consultation process following the report of the finance committee.

We have had continuing consultations, as my colleague and I have both referred to today, simply to listen to Canadians to get their ideas. Once we have a specific proposal, then we will put that proposal on the table.

As my colleague has said, we are still consulting and we are still listening before we make a final decision.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, clearly the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is concerned that the kind of proposals this government is trying to shove down the throats of Canadians on the GST is what it is going to get.

Last year the Minister of Finance said that the GST would improve the over-all fairness of the tax, and that the GST would be visible. Now the Minister of Revenue has floated an idea that in fact basically changes the premise of what was presented in this House, as the Leader of the Opposition has said.

As early as this morning the CFIB said that the changes that it understands might be forthcoming would be: "No panacea. It does not solve the problem".

When will the minister realize that no amount of changes can change this tax?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I guess my hon. friend is saying: "Let's go back to the old tax". The old tax is a hidden tax. It is totally invisible as far as the consumer is concerned.

Is my hon. friend saying that the GST is not visible? It is 7 per cent. People will see it on cash register slips. They will see it on signs in the stores. They will hear it in advertising. How can she possibly say that it is not visible?

She then went on to say that my colleague floated an idea. My colleague did not float the idea. It was discussed in a Senate committee hearing, the Senate committee that my hon. friend is supporting. This is the Senate that members of the NDP have said that they have absolutely no use for. Yet she turns turtle on this and says: "We like the Senate now".