

Adjournment Debate

private sector. Federal institutions are protected by Acts of Parliament. There are other institutions, such as banks that are regulated by federal authority as well. But private corporations are not nearly as restricted in their utilization and the way in which they handle social insurance numbers as are other authorities. It is linking social insurance numbers to private financial information with which I have great difficulty and with which many other people have also. A social insurance number can track all kinds of things, such as criminal records, school records and all types of financial information.

• (1805)

I just want to read an excerpt from a letter that I received from a lady who resides in my constituency. She is a senior citizen. Her name is Mrs. Lydia Scott. She lives in the Village of Gagetown. She writes in a communication to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), and I will just quote it in part:

I don't approve of my number being known all across Canada and I want my Government to know it makes us old "folk" not very comfortable to have our SIN splashed all across Canada.

That epitomizes the concerns expressed by senior citizens. I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that a former and very respected Prime Minister of this country, the late Right Hon. John G. Diefenbaker when it comes to this sort of thing must be spinning in his grave.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vincent Della Noce (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague raises the issue of the security of personal and confidential information provided by individuals to the government. I wish to reassure my hon. friend and say, as the Minister of National Revenue said in the House on April 18, that taxpayers should not be concerned or feel vulnerable because they provided their social insurance number on their income tax return. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that Revenue Canada (Taxation) uses the social insurance number only as permitted by law and only when it is essential for the fair and consistent administration of the Income Tax Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member correctly stated that last June, the Government started to implement its commitment to reduce the use of the social insurance number as a universal identifier. The Government announced its intention to restrict the use of the social insurance number by federal institutions to the administration of income tax, pensions, social programs and benefits and specific federal Acts. This decision was the result of a government-wide study of the use of social insurance numbers. Mr. Speaker, the Government, recognizing that the social insurance number was often used for purposes other than those for which it was intended, asked that it not be used in many federal activities: for example, citizenship applications, credit checks for federal programs and commercial permit systems.

Since 1967, individuals are legally required to enter their social insurance number on their income tax return, thus facilitating the processing of returns, requests for adjustments and enquiries. It is true, Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague pointed out, that tax reform has increased the number of cases where individuals are required to provide their SIN for income tax purposes. For example, financial institutions must record the SIN on the information statements they produce to report individuals' investment income. Penalties are provided for non-compliance.

• (1810)

The purpose of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, is to make the administration of the tax system efficient by improving the processing of returns and compliance with the requirements of the Income Tax Act, because under this Act, all forms of income must be reported. This fair and consistent enforcement of the provisions of the Act for all taxpayers encourages voluntary compliance, the basis of the self-assessment system.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure Canadians that this need to obtain information so that we can provide taxpayers with services is accompanied by appropriate provisions with respect to confidentiality. Confidentiality is obtained through the enforcement, control and strict respect of the access-to-information procedures. Canadians need not have the slightest concern about the protection of the confidentiality of personal information.