

House whether he is proposing or intending to bring in amendments to that bill which have not been presented to this House of Commons.

**Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, I was here last night during the course of the debate. The Leader of the Opposition did not share that opportunity. I believe what the hon. member was endeavouring to indicate was that we had not reached final reading stage of the bill, rather than the final bill.

**An hon. Member:** That's not what she said.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

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## NATIONAL REVENUE

### CONFIDENTIALITY OF INCOME TAX FILES

**Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. If the Minister of Finance will allow the Minister of National Revenue to be a "cutting figure", I would ask him a question.

**An hon. Member:** Very funny. I bet it took you an hour to dream that one up.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Mr. Speaker, in view of the plans the Department of National Revenue has for closing down district taxation offices and replacing over-the-counter dealings in respect of income tax files by a Zenith line regional centre in places like Winnipeg, Shawinigan and Surrey, will the minister advise the House when this plan will be brought into effect and, specifically, what plans he is making or what he has in mind to protect the confidentiality of income tax information provided by taxpayers, with this new telephone-in system he is proposing in his department?

**Hon. A. C. Abbott (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Small Business)):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to commend the hon. member for his courage in asking a provocative question. It being the Christmas season, I will not even show a glint of steel.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Abbott:** I should point out to him that in respect of setting up district offices as central offices, such as in Surrey, Sudbury, Shawinigan and other centres, the purpose is not to remove all the district offices, as the hon. member suggests, but to provide decentralization of government services in order to bring the government in Ottawa closer to the people. This does not diminish the service; it enhances it.

As to the use of the telephone central system, I can assure the hon. member that not only will full confidentiality be afforded taxpayers, but it will be confidentiality exceeded only by conditions in my own office.

### Privilege—Mr. Yewchuk

**An hon. Member:** Heaven help us!

● (1502)

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Mr. Speaker, that is the most depressing answer I have ever heard. The information I have is that over-the-counter consultation which takes place in district offices will be phased out and the files moved to these regional offices.

Will the minister tell the House whether he intends to use social insurance numbers as the identifying number for telephone use by taxpayers in protecting confidentiality? In view of the fact that in each city across Canada there is, padlocked, a very elaborate computer system belonging to Loto Select, would the minister consider using that facility in order to save the department some money in the implementation of these regional offices?

**Mr. Abbott:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for whatever impression the hon. member may have formed about computer facilities. I would say that the service which will be set up will look after the needs of the taxpayer to a much higher degree even than they are looked after today.

Approximately 80 per cent to 85 per cent of all the inquiries to the tax department are routine and are capable of answers which are informational in character. Some of these inquiries require the more detailed answer which is fed into the computer and therefore take more time, and inquiries of higher complexity may take as long as ten days to two weeks. This will not be changed.

As to the use of social insurance numbers, I know this is a constant preoccupation of the hon. member. He should know that under the Income Tax Act there are special provisions where SIN is used by law as, for example, in the filing of the annual income tax return. The hon. member may raise an objection to that situation, but that is the law. As to the other uses of SIN, if they take place, this will be done for the purpose of aiding the taxpayer and will have nothing whatsoever to do with any breach of confidentiality of the information provided by the taxpayer.

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## PRIVILEGE

### MR. YEWCHUK—COMMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO MINISTER OF NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELFARE TO INDIAN DELEGATION

**Mr. W. Kenneth Robinson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment with regard to the alleged question of privilege raised yesterday by the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk). I would like to correct some of the things he stated and the write-up in the newspapers.

I did not meet with 30 Indians, only three. I did so to listen to their complaints and be helpful, and there was no confrontation. The meeting was very amiable and it was on a voluntary basis. The words alleged were taken totally out of context and