

lation of statistical series on such subjects as output, employment, prices and trade. Similarly, insofar as these series constitute components of the national income and expenditure accounts, small business data contribute to the production of our aggregate economic indicators.

With the creation of the new Ministry of State for Small Businesses, this government has given a clear indication that it is concerned about the paperwork burden which falls on the small businessman. Statistics Canada, for its part, is actively pursuing ways and means of reducing its share of this burden. The use of administrative records such as income tax returns as a substitute for statistical surveys is a concrete example of such a reduction. This year alone, Statistics Canada will be able to exempt between 70,000 and 75,000 respondent businesses, mostly small businesses, from various surveys.

Another means of reducing the response burden is by using sample surveys instead of the traditional complete census. However, when sample surveys are used the importance of obtaining a response from every member in the sample is all the more critical since in such a situation each respondent represents several hundred others. Again I must emphasize that to introduce the concept of voluntary response to such surveys without first analysing the potential impact very carefully, and subsequently making necessary adjustments to compensate for any changes in response rates, would be irresponsible.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the possibility of introducing voluntary responses to some Statistics Canada surveys is under examination by officials of the department who are carefully assessing the impact such a change would have on the reliability of Canada's official statistics. In addition it must be stressed that Statistics Canada is very sincerely concerned with the response burden imposed by its survey-taking activity and is actively pursuing several specific programs designed to reduce this burden. Finally, we should not forget that although Canadians have a statutory obligation to provide responses to official surveys conducted under the authority of the Statistics Act, they are, by this very act, provided with an iron-clad guarantee that the confidential information they provide will be carefully protected and will never be released in an identifiable format without prior express written permission from the respondent in question.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that other hon. members will join with me in defeating this bill, one which, though superficially innocent, could be potentially detrimental to our national statistical system.

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, when I first read the bill introduced by the hon. lady from Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) and then listened to her words of wisdom, I wondered whether there would be any further speakers because I assumed the path of sanity and responsibility on the part of the government would simply be to accept the measure and refer it to the committee along with the amendment my hon. friend indicated would be proper at that stage. Instead, we have been treated to one of the greatest pieces of

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nonsense I have heard during private members' hour for some time.

I think much too highly of the hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Poulin) to believe that he himself was the author of the speech he presented to us. When he launched into his paean of praise for Statistics Canada it was obvious that it must have originated with that organization itself, because no one else, not even his own department, would indulge in the kind of nonsense which has taken up the time of this House for the last ten minutes. When the hon. member went on talking about the accuracy of results, scientific techniques and the updating of Statistics Canada, I wonder that even the author of that purple prose in Statistics Canada could have said it with a straight face, realizing over the past few months and years the numerous instances of the many obvious weaknesses that exist with respect to the gathering of statistics in this country.

● (1730)

I come from a province which has been plagued for years with this fact. I am sorry I did not bring the material along and send it over to the parliamentary secretary, but I would remind him that they had to go to the point of including at the bottom of the page of statistics that related to Prince Edward Island the note that their own figures were indeed so insufficient that they were not prepared to stand by them.

I had a couple of classic examples of this in the last few months, and I think the one that really struck me as the most ludicrous was the situation in which we were asking Statistics Canada for information as to the number of housing starts in Prince Edward Island. They arrived at some mysterious figure by some kind of ethereal survey which they conduct on a regional basis in which they compute the number of housing starts, and I knew from the figures they reported that they were so wildly at variance with reality that no person in their right mind would accept them even for a moment.

What I did, Mr. Speaker, was what any person on Prince Edward Island would normally do. I telephoned the Prince Edward Island Housing Authority which records each and every month the absolute number of housing starts on Prince Edward Island, because you cannot build a house on P.E.I. today unless you first of all receive permission or a licence from the provincial government. In other words, at this very moment any individual can telephone the authority and get the absolute number of housing starts. This is something which has apparently not yet seeped through to Statistics Canada, which is still indulging in its own kind of crystal ball gazing with respect to housing. That is only one recent example, Mr. Speaker.

We have talked over the past few weeks of the unemployment problem. It is unfortunate that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) did not hear this wonderful eulogy about Statistics Canada or he might have wanted to speak ahead of me. I have received numerous letters indicating that there is no way that they are basing their present program of job creation and the tuning of the amount of money to be spent in various constituencies on the facts provided by Statis-