

Oral Questions

been confusing the issue by relying on one of his colleagues who is very good at simplifying things, at making them simplistic, and as a result, the Hon. Member has raised a debate where there is none.

[English]

GARNISHEING OF PENSION INCOME

Hon. Ron Huntington (Capilano): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of National Revenue. Revenue Canada has moved from an era where terms could be negotiated by taxpayers having cash flow problems, to an era where hard, brutal, arbitrary measures of collection are the order of the day, and where any sense of compassion for people in trouble has disappeared. If this is not so, why would the Minister of National Revenue, just before Christmas, garnishee \$100 per month from a \$254 per month pension cheque, to collect a 1976 tax debt which occurred as a result of a bankruptcy in which the party lost his home and all other assets? Is it not time for his Department to return to a sense of service and respect for people in this country?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, one of the objectives of the Department is to serve the public and to be fair and compassionate in its dealings with the taxpayers. We reasserted this aim last week when we announced that a study would be undertaken to advise us on ways of improving our service to the public. We have therefore reasserted in practice this desire and concern to serve the public well.

My second comment has to do with the question asked by the Hon. Member, Mr. Speaker. When he speaks of fairness, he should know that one very basic rule is that you should not refer to specific cases the circumstances of which are unknown to you. Indeed, I would legally be prevented from discussing this case because it is said in the Act that you cannot refer to specific cases. The Hon. Member is therefore not abiding by the rules of the game. I would like to repeat that there has been no change in our policy of attempting to come to an agreement with taxpayers on their tax assessment, and when they are unable because of their financial situation to make an immediate repayment, to come to an arrangement acceptable to both parties for repayment of the debt.

[English]

Mr. Huntington: Mr. Speaker, I thought the Prime Minister asked us to bring specific cases to the attention of the Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. It is understood that specific tax cases should not be mentioned or cited individually; otherwise, the general principles can be raised.

Mr. Huntington: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I did not mention a specific case.

DEFINITION OF "HARDSHIP"

Hon. Ron Huntington (Capilano): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. When the Minister accepts third party demands against pensioners and where this loss of income creates hardship, why does the system force the pensioner to apply for further assistance from her Department in order to make Revenue Canada back off? Is she not worried about the definition and the management of the definition of hardship remaining with Revenue Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I understand all the implications of the question. In any case, I do not have the answer at hand and I shall make enquiries, but I must ask the Hon. Member to please be more specific.

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● (1440)

[English]

THE BUDGET

ANNOUNCEMENT OF PRESENTATION ON WEDNESDAY,
FEBRUARY 15

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. The Minister has made reference to his forthcoming Budget. I would like to ask him to what degree this Budget has been structured and when this Budget will be presented to the House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Budget is being structured, and structured well, I hope. I still have to consult with a few groups within the next few days. However, I expect that those consultations should be completed by the end of next week at the latest and I would expect, therefore, to introduce a Budget in this House on Wednesday, February 15.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

CLAIMS ADJUDICATORS IN TORONTO OFFICES

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, to whom I have given notice of