

Oral Questions

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): I indicated to the House this morning that as soon as I received permission from the RCMP I thought it was the responsible thing to inform Canadians first about the situation, otherwise they would have no way of knowing. Secondly, we are trying to find ways that we can minimize the risk. But I would be less than frank if I told the House, or told my friend opposite, that if this information is in unauthorized hands, which we do not yet know, there could be any blanket assurances. The best assurance that Canadians can have at this moment in order to protect themselves is simply to know that this shocking breach of security has occurred, and that there may be a danger that people will use their SIN numbers for the type of purpose that my hon. friend has indicated.

NOTIFICATION OF PUBLIC

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): The Minister appropriately warned Canadians this morning by making a statement in the House, and by making a statement outside the House. But I say to the Minister that hundreds of thousands of Canadians may miss that information because they missed the news.

Does the Government intend to write to all the people who have Social Insurance Numbers and inform them directly of the dangers involved so that they will not be left out? Is the Government at least giving serious consideration to changing the Social Insurance Number of every Canadian?

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): As I believe the Hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party knows, we did inform the provinces this morning as soon as it became appropriate to do so. We have informed other Ministers whose Departments are affected and we can count on their assistance and facilities to spread the bad news. We will take every possible step to communicate with individual Canadian tax filers. It is not yet clear whether it is feasible to change individual SIN numbers, or whether there are other appropriate means that we can institute to provide protection. What we could do and what we will do is take whatever requirements are there that allow the summary information on the microfiche to be used, and vary the codes.

DELAY IN INFORMING MINISTER

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. The integrity of the entire Canadian tax system is threatened by this inexcusable breach of taxpayer privacy. Why was the Minister only informed on November 4, when the files disappeared on October 30? Why was there a six-day delay in him being informed? Who is running the Department?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I can tell my hon. friend opposite that I am no more happy with this than he is. As I said before, this was an

inexplicable delay. I know that the officials involved were diligently pursuing this missing data. I should have been informed, and my deputy should have been informed. The investigation and review will perhaps shed more light on this, and there will be disciplinary action taken where appropriate.

[Translation]

TAXPAYERS' CONFIDENCE IN INCOME TAX SYSTEM

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. This theft is a threat to the integrity of Canada's entire tax system. How can Canadians trust this Government if it cannot keep their income tax returns confidential? Could the Minister explain to the House how Canadians can be expected to trust this Government?

[English]

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): I apologize to the House. I did not get the purport of my hon. friend's question. I can say to him that I agree that the integrity of the Canadian tax system has been damaged. I am sorry that I did not understand the last part of his question.

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● (1430)

TRADE

EXPORT PERMITS—SHIPMENT OF HELICOPTER PARTS TO IRAN

Ms. Pauline Jewett (New Westminster—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. The policy of the Government on export permits up to September 10 was that such permits could be restricted in the case of goods described as civilian strategic equipment; not just military, but civilian strategic equipment. They could also be banned where a Government was pursuing policies on human rights wholly repugnant to Canadian values. Is the Minister saying that the permission given to Pratt & Whitney and others to ship helicopter parts to Iran is in conformity with the policy which was in existence until September 10 of this year?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that Bell 212 helicopters are commercially oriented helicopters with PT6 T-3 engines. They are used for that particular purpose. The spare parts in question were spare parts for that helicopter. As I outlined earlier, Pratt & Whitney officials advise the Government that it would be almost impossible in Iran to reconfigure the Cobra to adapt to the types of engines in question. Once again, we have received assurances that the spare parts for these particular helicopters were used for civilian purposes, and that is where it rests.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Ms. Pauline Jewett (New Westminster—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister if this could then be described as