

Oral Questions

My question to the Minister is this. Since November 4 you were aware that 16 million tax files had been lost. What type of measure did you implement?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I would ask that the Hon. Member remember that when addressing another Member or a Minister, he is not supposed to use the word "you".

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I gather that my honourable colleague certainly gave permission to this lady to do that. He probably also gave her a Power of Attorney. I do not know what the circumstances were. But if this situation has occurred, and if it is irregular, then there are measures that will have to be taken. On the other hand, I would like to know more about the circumstances before answering the question and just exactly why he did this, and under what circumstances the lady used his name and his data.

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, you cannot give Power of Attorney by telephone. Therefore, the woman just picked up the phone and said that "I am Alfonso Gagliano, this is my social insurance number," and she received the information.

[Translation]

CONFIDENTIALITY OF INCOME TAX RETURNS

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Considering the declaration of taxpayers' rights that guarantees that financial and personal information is confidential, how do you account for the fact that although since November 4, you were aware that tax files had been stolen, this morning, November 18, it is still possible to have access to that information by telephone? Is this declaration worth the paper it is written on?

[English]

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): That kind of telephone access, if it is exactly as the Hon. Member described it, is certainly not a proper type of access. I will take that very seriously. As I did yesterday, I am also suggesting that in view of what happened there has been a breach of the Taxpayers' Declaration of Rights. The very fact that this information disappeared is a guarantee of that breach.

* * *

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

DETROIT CONFERENCE ON GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY CONTROL

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. Starting yesterday and continuing today and tomorrow there is an important conference taking place in Detroit on the subject matter of water quality control in the Great Lakes.

• (1425)

Attending that conference are the Governors of two U.S. States and the Ministers of Environment from both the Province of Quebec and the Province of Ontario. At a time when we are trying to get the Americans to take environmental matters seriously, why was the Government of Canada represented by only an empty chair?

Hon. Tom McMillan (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member's question is based upon a story in *The Globe and Mail* this morning which was as outrageously unfair as it was totally inaccurate. It was unfair because I had three speaking engagements within the same 72-hour period, so it was not physically possible for me to be in Detroit, and inaccurate because the Government of Canada was in fact represented at that conference by the seven top experts on the subject in the entire country.

Mr. Broadbent: I want the Minister to know that, however the Government may act, we do not rely upon *The Globe and Mail* for our facts.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

COMPOSITION OF CANADIAN REPRESENTATION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister confirm that he just informed the organizers of the conference not many days ago that he would not be attending? Will he admit to the House that while there were officials there, there was not a political representative of the Government of Canada and there were political representatives of the Governments of Ontario and Quebec and of two U.S. States? Where is the leadership from Canada on this?

Hon. Tom McMillan (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I would be the last one to accuse the Hon. Member and his Party of relying totally upon *The Globe and Mail* for their facts. When they rely upon facts at all, which is rare enough, they come from the Canadian Labour Congress. The truth is that the Government of the United States was not represented by a major politician. It was represented by a senior official. For our part, we were represented by among other people Dr. James Kingham, the Director General of the Great Lakes program.

Mr. Broadbent: The two million Canadians represented by the Canadian Labour Congress will have noted the Minister's comments with interest.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister not think that the Government of Canada is lending credibility to the arguments of certain American politicians, namely, that we do not take the issue seriously when we do not send a political representative down there to make the case which would demonstrate Canadian government leadership? Surely that is the issue.