



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Rodger Cuzner
Member of Parliament
Cape Breton—Canso

January 28, 2012

The Honourable Minister Gail Shea
Minister of National Revenue
Room 556, Confederation Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Honourable Minister:

RE: Effects of Tax Filing Changes on Seniors and the Poor

I am writing you concerning your decision to stop mailing out personalized tax packages and eliminating they T1 Special form in the attempt to transition people to online tax filing. I have received complaints regarding this decision and the process by which it has been made public. I would ask that you review this decision, including improving the effectiveness of how it is communicated to Canadians, in particular seniors.

It is my understanding that CRA will no longer be mailing out tax packages to individuals in an effort to get more people to file online. Although I understand the reality of today's increasingly digital society, I strongly disagree with the timeframe for implementation and the way the decision has been communicated to the public.

It seems to be an increasing trend by the Conservative government to eliminate in person, phone and/or paper based services; forcing Canadians instead to use the internet to access important and needed government services. What is also troubling is the government making these decisions with little input from Canadians and with very little notice given to them. This totally disregards the reality of internet usage by certain groups within Canadian society that do not use or have access to the internet.

Statistics Canada surveys have consistently shown that seniors and low income individuals are two groups that have either difficulty accessing or using the internet. According to Statistics Canada's latest internet usage survey, 21% of Canadians do not have access to the internet, including 46% of low income households (incomes of \$30,000 or less). (StasCan Canada Internet Use Survey, 2010) More concerning for seniors is that approximately one-half (49%) of those aged 65 to 74 and 73% of those aged 75 years and older do not use the internet. (StatsCan Individual Internet use and E-commerce, 2010)

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Both low income Canadians, and in particular seniors, are not currently capable or well prepared to have the delivery of vital government services, such as tax filing, switched to internet based. The apparent decision by CRA to force people to online tax filing disregards this reality. It is unfair and unrealistic to think that these Canadians can make the transition easily within the timeframe established by the CRA. Would it not be more prudent to identify these groups of people who do not have online access and develop a longer term strategy to ensure they can properly transition to online services?

Furthermore, I believe the way in which the decision to stop mailing out tax packages and eliminating the T1 Special form was communicated to Canadians could have been done in a more effective and transparent way. Many Canadians, especially seniors will be waiting for their tax return package to come in the mail that will never arrive. It is my understanding that the only notice of these new measures given to Canadians has been via the CRA website. That does little to inform the people who will be most adversely affected by these new measures. I fear that many Canadians whose only option to date has been to file by mail will miss the deadline and therefore incur penalties and interest charges. What specifically is the CRA doing to ensure this will not be the case?

Although I believe in the continued advancement and improvement of online government services, they must be introduced in a reasonable manner with reasonable notice given, taking into account their impact on potentially vulnerable groups like the poor and seniors. I ask that you review your decision in this matter to provide for a better strategy to address the concerns of seniors and the poor.

I look forward to your response on this matter.

Sincerely,



Rodger Cuzner, M.P.
Cape Breton – Canso

cc: Moses Znaimer, President CARP
Bill VanGorder, President, CARP Nova Scotia
Hon. Alice Wong, Minister of State (Seniors)