Service and convince Americans that, while the Government is still spending too much money and is not spending it as wisely as it should, that the tax system is fairer and that the collection process is fairer as a result of the reform efforts that we are about to undertake.

I don’t think people expect to love their Internal Revenue agent, unless they married one or unless one is their child or their parent. But they expect to be treated fairly. And obviously they do not expect to be contacted by the IRS that they are potentially in deep trouble, and it is that threat that drives many people to go ahead and declare income that they might have hidden and to pay taxes that they didn’t want to pay.

So, finding this balance, I submit, is going to be a difficult task. I am very grateful that I am on the Finance Committee and I am going to have an opportunity to play a small role in it. I think it is important. I am glad that we are waiting to gather more facts, not just on the problem but the solution. I thank my colleagues for their tolerance and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALARD). Who yields time? The SENATOR from MICHIGAN?

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I seek unanimous consent to speak for up to 5 minutes, the time to be deducted from the leader’s time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I don’t believe I will necessarily need the full 5 minutes, even, but let me speak today about an issue of great concern to the citizens of my State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

BERRY ALERT CAME WEEK AFTER SALE

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, in March of this year, over 200 schoolchildren in my State contracted the hepatitis A virus from food served by the school lunch program. As news of the outbreak began to pour in, the Michigan Department of Community Health and the Centers for Disease Control went into action to determine the cause.

They soon found the culprit: frozen strawberries sold to the school lunch program by a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamson prosecution, could not be reached for an interview.

The agency is continuing to investigate the Mexican strawberry sale, which also has been linked to nearly 50 cases of hepatitis A in Maine, Louisiana and Wisconsin. Federal and state health officials believe a berry bought in Mexico was contaminated and that the strawberries were served in February.

The disclosure of the early warning is in witness statements recently released under unusual circumstances to defense attorneys for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc. of Oceanside, Calif.

The key witness statement that recently was released was made by Frederick J. Haas, who operates a Watsonville produce sales operation called U.S. Food Service.

The witness statements were made in April. Some of the witness statements detail how on Oct. 24, 1996, a federal official received an early complaint and was investigating a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

At congressional hearings in the spring on the hepatitis A epidemic, USDA officials testified they only had vague allegations about a possible illegal sale shortly before the outbreak.

When Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., learned the Union Tribune had reported the USDA had evidence in January of an illegal strawberry sale, he expressed outrage and called for a Senate hearing on the USDA’s handling of the strawberry sale.

Phillip B. Halpern, an assistant U.S. attorney whose office is handling the Andrew & Williamso
Breed ordered his secretary to remove copies of her administrative report from USDA files.

But Gardei’s April 3 statement to USDA investigators makes no mention of any calls in October from Florida or any other California strawberry leader.

Neither Gardei nor Breed have been available for interview. Breed denies in his statement to the inspector general’s office that he sought to cover up or mislead USDA investigators. His secretary denied in her statement that he ordered her to remove Gardei’s administrative report from USDA files.

While Michigan’s Abraham had hoped to have a hearing scheduled in 1996 to explore USDA handling of the strawberry purchase and probe, congressional aides say it appears as if no hearing will be held this year.

Congressionals aides say USDA Inspector General Roger C. Viadero has asked to meet privately with interested legislators about the issue.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, this information, if true, is very inconsistent with what was asserted by Federal officials at a June 5 hearing of the full Agriculture Committee. There, Administration officials testified at the hearing that they knew nothing more than nonspecific and vague complaints of potential violations at Andrew & Williamson, the San Diego company which sold the fruit to the Government for school lunches.

If the newspaper article and witness allegations are true, it would certainly raise serious questions as to whether the full committee and this Senate were misled. I believe we are owed an explanation and suggest the Government agencies responsible for protecting us are doing their job.

This dangerous incident, the poisoning of Michigan children by their own School Lunch Program, should concern us all, Mr. President. The company involved seems to have demonstrated a reckless disregard for public safety.

To that end, I have introduced legislation which makes such conduct a felony with a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment and/or a fine of $250,000 per count. This change in law will ensure that individuals who intentionally misrepresent their goods will now suffer the appropriate consequences of their actions. The recent outbreaks of hepatitis A, cyclospora, and E. coli demonstrate that a new commitment to food safety is sorely needed in this country. I will continue working to see that the committee has the appropriate measures to assure the USDA, FDA, and Centers for Disease Control in their efforts to keep America’s food supply the safest in the world.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.