

Senator LONG. Mr. Kass, let me interrupt you a minute. Do I understand you to say that in Bowling Green, my hometown, there is that type of system where a veteran can dial a particular number and reach the Veterans' Administration in St. Louis and talk to someone about his problem or complaint without a long-distance call charge?

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Not at this time, Senator. We are running a pilot operation actually.

Senator LONG. I see.

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. We have FX telephone service in 12 large communities at this time.

Senator LONG. Is it your plan to go into it so that the system will be nationwide?

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Yes, sir. We plan to have about 74 cities covered by fiscal year 1969.

Senator LONG. Your plans are, though, to have it in all towns of any size?

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Yes, sir.

Senator LONG. Suppose a veteran calls the St. Louis VA office, would he be assigned a contact man?

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Yes, sir; if you pick up the phone and call St. Louis, you would get a contact representative who would give his name, and ask the veteran to refer any further questions on his case to him.

Senator LONG. Mr. Kass, you mentioned the agency I have heard a little about—the Internal Revenue Service. It seems to me the things that we get a lot of complaints about concerning the IRS is that the citizen either gets a form back filled out by a computer, or they talk to one fellow today and somebody else tomorrow; nobody knows about their particular problem one way or the other. Would you think perhaps some of the big problems citizens have with that agency is the cold mechanism that they come in contact with when they have complaints, instead of a warm, personal individual they get when they call your agency?

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Well, all I can really testify to, sir, is our contact service, but I would like to say that the first requirement is that these people have an image of themselves as talking to their own brother when they talk to this client.

Senator LONG. It is much warmer talking to an individual or brother than to just a cold computer.

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Right.

Senator LONG. It might be desirable if some of the other agencies would think along those lines. I think you are to be commended for it certainly.

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. I am in favor of it personally.

Senator LONG. I think you are to be commended for it because, incidentally, that has a close relationship to the ombudsman theory we are talking about here.

Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Kass.

Mr. KASS. This, in effect, is a built-in ombudsman that the VA has instituted?

Mr. GUY WILLIAMS. Yes, sir; from all I have heard of the ombudsman, I would say you are correct.