

Supply

installation of personal computers in all Members' offices here on the Hill. It is a matter that is important to all Members of the House of Commons.

It is important that we establish that the rules and procedures that have applied for years to our normal files apply to our electronic files. I would ask you to examine the issue, Mr. Speaker, and my staff, the staff of the Hon. Member for Churchill and the staff of the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap as well as ourselves would be more than willing to provide any additional information we can.

Finally, it is irrelevant why the information had to be removed. It is the process that I am concerned about.

Mr. Speaker: I take it that the Hon. Member would move the usual motion in the event that I would find that there is a prima facie case of privilege?

Mr. Angus: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened with some concern to the intervention of the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan (Mr. Angus). There may be other Members who can relate similar experiences. If that is so, I would invite them to call my office immediately.

What has taken place may well have been done in the greatest innocence, but I will most certainly look into it. An electronic file is just as much a file as any other file. I hope that we will find that the answer is innocent enough, but certainly the practice is not to be condoned. I will report back to the House at the very earliest opportunity.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 78, I do now leave the chair for the House to go into Committee of the Whole.

* * *

SUPPLY

CONSIDERATION OF SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (D)

House in Committee of the Whole for consideration of an item of the Supplementary Estimates (D) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1988—Mr. Paproski in the chair.

Resolved—That a sum not exceeding \$803,903,000 be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1988, as follows: Vote 35D—Agriculture—Grains and Oilseeds—Operating expenditures and the grants listed in the Estimates, \$803,903,000.

The Deputy Chairman: Shall the resolution carry?

Mr. Mayer: Mr. Chairman, we are here today on behalf of Canadian farmers as a result of an announcement made by the

Prime Minister in Ottawa at the Agriculture Outlook Conference in December. Perhaps I could say a few words about the circumstances that have led us to this motion in the House.

I think most Canadians are aware that we are in the middle of a very serious international grains situation. International prices have fallen dramatically over the last three or four years. Canada is a major player on the export market. In the case of wheat, about 80 per cent of what our producers grow must be exported. As international prices fall, it becomes a very difficult situation for Canadian grain producers.

The result has been that many farmers, especially on the grain and oilseeds side, are in some considerable difficulty. This has shown up in all sorts of areas. Prices have dropped pretty dramatically and in some cases as much as 50 per cent in the last two and a half years. I think all of us can relate to that. If we were to have our incomes or salaries cut by some 50 per cent over the last two and a half years, all of us would realize the dramatic effect that would have on the way we operate our businesses or our households.

There is no question that we are facing a very difficult situation. In many ways it is an international war, but in this case it is an insidious and undeclared war that is seeing casualties show up in the agricultural communities.

As a Government, we have responded in three areas and with three distinct policies on a consistent basis since the very serious situation developed. First, we have taken a deliberate policy of showing support for our agricultural sector. This has shown up in many ways. We have reduced the amount of tax payable by Canadian farmers. When prices fall, input costs must be cut, and that is the normal reaction of any business. Part of the input cost is associated with taxes and the Government has reduced the amount of tax payable on farm fuel. That has resulted in a saving of over \$200 million to grain and oilseeds producers since the inception of that program.

Second, the Government has made a direct injection of cash. A year ago, many will recall that \$1 billion was made available to grain and oilseeds producers right across Canada under the auspices of the Special Canadian Grains Program. Some 30 per cent of that money was put into the hands of farmers prior to the beginning of the last seeding season. That money was in the hands of farmers in February and March, 1987. The money we are talking about today will be in the hands of farmers in a similar period of time, except in this case we are making 75 per cent of the money available as an initial payment and those cheques will be going out prior to the end of March, whereas a year ago we made available 30 per cent of the over-all payment.

• (1130)

That is a substantial amount of money. Under this program alone approximately \$1.5 billion will go to farmers in this fiscal year. That is an unprecedented amount of direct cash support for Canadian farmers, but we face an unprecedented situation.