

making process. We would hope that this can proceed as soon as possible.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank you for the work you have done in making your decision. I was glad to hear the Minister, speaking for the Government, say that the Government is willing to have the committee go forward on this issue. I hope the chairperson of that committee will call a meeting quickly so arrangements can be made. I know our representative on the committee will be available for a meeting to be called very quickly.

I think it is also important that the inquiry not be restricted to just Mr. Gorman. I think there may be other people who have to be called on this topic to get the complete picture.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I want to thank you for your most informative ruling on the question of privilege. I have noted the statement of the Government House Leader to the effect that the Government wants to see the Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure go into this matter. Obviously our representative on the committee will be ready to do his duty with respect to the work of the committee. We hope that the Government will make it clear to its members on the committee that they should not be constrained in how they look into this question.

I want to observe that if and when the committee goes into this matter this does not mean, as far as the Official Opposition is concerned, that it is no longer appropriate to raise the subject in the course of the House of Commons Question Period in so far as we are also dealing here with the matter of the responsibility and accountability of the ministry to the House of Commons and the people of Canada. This remains an issue for the House through the Question Period or otherwise even though some aspects of the matter may be under study by the Elections and privileges committee.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I could respond to the latter point which the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) has made. I do not think there was anything in my ruling suggesting that appropriate questions ought to be precluded. The Chair always has to consider questions in their context which, of course, I will continue to do on behalf of all Hon. Members. I want to reiterate that, provided the questions are appropriate, the ruling in itself does not preclude them.

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PRIVILEGE

PRIVACY OF MEMBERS' OFFICES—ALLEGED BREACH

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning on a question of privilege regarding a matter of the breach of the rights of three Members of Parliament as it relates to the privacy of their physical offices.

Privileges

As you are aware, the Board of Internal Economy approved a pilot project for the installation of personal computers in, I believe, about 30 offices on the Hill. Three of those computers were installed in the Office of the House Leader of the New Democratic Party, the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis), the Whip, the Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy), and the Chairperson of the NDP caucus, myself, the Member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

We are entering a new age, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to ensure that the rules that have applied to the old ways also apply to the new. The day before yesterday an employee of the House of Commons, the Oasis group, entered my office, that of the Member for Churchill, that of the Member for Kamloops—Shuswap and perhaps the offices of other Members of Parliament who are participating in the pilot project. The impression was given to staff that the individual was interested in determining the usage of the equipment and the software contained therein. They purposely removed a software program from the computers in a systematic way without indicating to either staff or Members their reason for doing so. I want to be very clear; I am not suggesting that the removal was unnecessary, but I am complaining about the manner in which it was accomplished.

● (1120)

Perhaps I could use an analogy. I think it is the common understanding in this House that if we received documentation, for example an Oasis manual which explains how a particular program is to work, and I had my staff place that manual in a cardboard file and place that file in a filing cabinet, no employee of the House of Commons would even think of walking into my office, going to that filing cabinet and removing that documentation. In fact, the Oasis staff were removing the electronic file that had been installed in the computers in my office, in the office of the Hon. Member for Churchill and in the office of the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap.

I think it is important that we ensure that from here on in, regardless of why the information was installed in that computer and why it needed to be removed, such information will only be removed with the explicit permission of those responsible within the offices. In other words, we should treat electronic material no differently than we would treat what we refer to as hard-copy material. Electronic information must be handled in the same manner.

In addition to this unauthorized removal of the software which was basically the instructions for one of the programs, a number of other files were accidentally erased.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to review the rules of the House of Commons as they apply to the offices of Members to ensure that, from here on in, employees of the House of Commons are not allowed to remove electronic information from computers installed in Members' offices. Let us remember that the Board of Internal Economy has authorized the