

Supply

•(2125)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The House has heard the terms of the motion, the suggestion by the government deputy whip. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's comments on the main estimates.

[Translation]

I would like to ask her a question about the cuts in the budget, and especially in the social programs envelope. As the hon. member said, the budget contains a number of cuts, especially in unemployment insurance, and in fact more than 50 per cent of the cuts in the budget affect social programs.

Does the hon. member agree with these cuts in social programs, especially when they attack the unemployed instead of attacking unemployment?

[English]

Mrs. Cowling: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

I should remind the hon. member that we are going through a process of review for the social security programs and it will be up to the people of this country to make that decision. We are listening through that consultation process and I am assured that the people of Canada will tell us what they believe is the right thing to do with respect to social programs.

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, to my colleague from Dauphin—Swan River, I am very much interested in issues that relate to the expenditures in the estimates and the budget.

Mr. Speaker, you will understand this being of the same bent, in the old hockey days I used to play in Dauphin. Dauphin is a small community very much the same as Kenora and places in my riding like Kenora, Dryden and Fort Frances. The thing that impressed me the most was the agricultural land that was available for production.

One thing in this budget the member could fill us in on is the issue of whether the government is listening regarding farmers. Farmers have had a very difficult time in the last few years. As I do not have a large agricultural sector and am not well versed in agricultural issues, I would like to know if she could tell me if we are on the right track as it relates to agricultural issues. Are there initiatives in the budget that she thinks are going to help the farmers in her area and across the west?

Mrs. Cowling: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question with respect to agriculture.

I want to assure the hon. member that for those of us who come to this House from a farming background, we have a number of issues around agriculture that are going to keep farm families in this country alive and well. I would like to mention a few of those.

One is the whole farm support program. I believe that the hon. minister of agriculture should be congratulated for taking the incentive to listen to farm families through a consultation process again and bringing forward those issues which are dear and near to the hearts of farm families.

•(2130)

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to participate in this debate tonight and to make a few comments, a few well-researched comments I might add. I have had a lot of time to prepare.

I listened with interest to a number of members who spoke earlier this evening. I was particularly concerned and tried to respond earlier in the form of a question and comment to Reform Party members who had been talking in the context of their remarks about the confidence convention in the House. I am very glad to have this opportunity to pick up where I left off at one point earlier.

I wanted to say and had an opportunity to partially say to Reform Party members that they should be a bit more humble about the whole tradition of advocating more free votes, less party discipline and less respect for the confidence convention in this House. I ask them to be cognizant of the fact that the special committee on reform of the House of Commons which was struck after the 1984 election and which was chaired by the Hon. Jim McGrath made a number of recommendations along the very lines the Reform Party members are in the habit of getting up and suggesting to the House.

I would suggest to my Reform Party colleagues that they read the McGrath report, if they have not already. Maybe some of them have. In there they will find recommendations about the confidence convention, about party discipline, about free votes. What they will find is a recommendation that there be a wider range of issues on which members of Parliament should feel freer to vote their conscience, or that of their constituents, or whatever they want to do, but that they not be bound by party discipline.

We received a lot of advice at that time from eminent constitutional and parliamentary scholars, like the late Eugene Forsey and others, that the confidence convention is given far too much weight in the Canadian political tradition. Even in the mother of Parliaments at Westminster will be found many more examples of backbench members of Parliament on the govern-