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ISSN 1180-436X

Legislative Assembly  
of Ontario  
Second Session, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Assemblée législative  
de l'Ontario  
Deuxième session, 37<sup>e</sup> législature

**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

**Thursday 8 November 2001**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Jeudi 8 novembre 2001**

**Standing committee on  
the Legislative Assembly**

Use of technology

**Comité permanent de  
l'Assemblée législative**

Utilisation de la technologie

Chair: Margaret Marland  
Clerk: Donna Bryce

Présidente : Margaret Marland  
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Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation  
3330 Édifice Whitney ; 99, rue Wellesley ouest  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400 ; télécopieur, 416-325-7430  
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE  
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Thursday 8 November 2001

Jeudi 8 novembre 2001

*The committee met at 1603 in committee room 1.*

**USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**The Chair (Mrs Margaret Marland):** Good afternoon. I'd like to call this meeting of the Legislative Assembly committee to order. Seeing that we have a quorum, we can start. We need to discuss the matter of the use of technology in the House as a follow-up to our last meeting with the Speaker and the Clerk and the Clerk Assistant.

**Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth):** It appeared as though there was almost a consensus at the last meeting—and I say almost—toward not doing anything on technology. I expressed at the very end of the meeting that I had some concerns that I didn't want us to be complete Luddites here and that I would entertain the possibility of a pilot project with laptops in the House.

They're being used in a lot of other jurisdictions, and just to prove that the NDP caucus is forward-thinking, in discussion the majority of our caucus were in favour of trying a pilot project of being allowed to use laptops in the House, with certain rules attached which we of course would discuss here. So I want it on the record that my caucus—and I'm representing them—were somewhat dismayed to hear that the committee wanted to dismiss going forward with any use of technology in the House. I don't think I have the support here for that, but I just want to put it on the record.

Second, I'd like to say that should we decide that the members will not move forward on using any technology in the House, I would like not to include the clerks in that decision. I firmly believe, in my reading of the material, of which there was a lot—looking through it and from the discussions here and from what I understand the clerks do, it might be to their benefit to have some kind of pilot project using laptops in certain areas.

Should we decide that the members not use technology, I would like to separate members' use, because there is a whole set of different issues, questions and concerns about that, some of which were brought up by all of us at the last meeting. But I believe the usage of, say, laptops by the clerks in certain circumstances may indeed help them do their job. I would propose—and I may make a motion on this later—if the clerks are interested in bringing forward a proposal on the usage of technology, be it laptops or something else, that they

come forward with a proposal for a pilot project. I'd like to hear what others have to say, and I can make a motion further to that discussion.

**The Chair:** Today I'm going to go in the traditional order, because last week I was bouncing all over the place. So if either of you wishes to speak—if not, I'll carry on for now. Ms Munro?

**Mrs Julia Munro (York North):** Thank you, Madam Chair. The people I spoke to were not in favour of laptops. I think there was some sense, perhaps, of things like pagers that don't make noises. There's sort of a distinction between technologies that would allow people to do other work at the same time, such as a laptop, and tools like a pager, which wouldn't interfere in the current situation of the responsibility of a member in the House.

In our conversations up to this point, I think we've tended to lump technologies together, and I would suggest to you that there seem to be some who differentiate between things like laptops and things like the pagers. As I say, the people I spoke to did not support the idea of laptops. They did, however, think that being able to have a silent pager was probably something that didn't interfere with the normal work of the House.

**The Chair:** Dwight?

**Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair):** We had already spoken in our caucus—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair:** Pardon?

**Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford):** We want to know which order. Are we going to speak person to person, or are we going party to party? I don't know. I was going to say something, but if we're going in a different order I don't care.

**Mr Duncan:** Let him go.

**The Chair:** All right. Go ahead. It's not timed, so—

**Mr Tascona:** OK. In the sense of dealing with this issue, there was minimal support to use some technology, be it a laptop or a silent pager, but there wasn't any majority view in terms of going in that direction. Personally, I'm not in favour of technology in the House or committees, but I'm open to discuss this. That wasn't my sense of what I was receiving.

**Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa):** I think I expressed myself quite clearly last time that I was very much opposed to the use of technology in the Legislature. It's a place of debate. As I specifically said last time, it's difficult enough for people to focus on the conversations we

are supposed to be dealing with, as opposed to outside distractions, whether it's answering letters or e-mails or staffing and things like that. Another distraction like that for the members would take away that much more from the House. So I'm very much opposed to the use of technology in the Legislature. As mentioned in the past, some things about use in committee and helping out some of the clerks—I think committees are a separate issue, and we should deal with it as such.

1610

**The Chair:** Jerry, you weren't here when Marilyn mentioned the clerks' use of laptops. You meant in the House and in committee, did you? I just want to clarify that.

**Ms Churley:** I said we should keep technology usage by the clerks—not just laptops—separate from usage by the members. Should they have a proposal, whether it be laptops—I expect that's the most likely—or other usage of technology that they think would benefit their jobs to serve us better, then I think they should be able to come forward with such a proposal, but that we keep it separate.

**The Chair:** Just to clarify your comments, Joe, are they pertaining to laptops? Do you support silent pagers, as Julia does?

**Mr Tascona:** No, no technology.

**Mr Ouellette:** No technology.

**Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton):** I personally feel that technology, unless it's going to enhance the role or purpose of the Legislature, and I don't think it does—I believe we end up getting as immediate access as we need to get notes back and forth. We have pages, people who do this work. To have technology for the sake of having technology, because it is now what we must do, for some reason, otherwise we can't function, I don't think is a good enough reason.

There is a purpose to the Legislature. In the time I've been here, we've functioned very well. I don't know how much more immediately we need information to be called out. I'm certainly of the view that more technology in the Legislature doesn't assist us in the role and work of the Legislature.

**Mr Duncan:** We had caucused the issue of laptops prior to the last meeting, and it's overwhelmingly opposed in our caucus. Frankly, we did not put it in the context of committee, but I suspect the view would be the same.

In respect to silent pagers, we have not specifically caucused on that notion. I suspect our members, on balance, would support the use of them, since I know there are a number who are already doing that. But I would put a caveat on that. I don't believe we would support any device that allows two-way communication, for instance—what do they call that thing, a BlackBerry or BlueBerry or something?

**Mr Tascona:** A raspberry.

**Mr Duncan:** I don't think there would be support for that. However, I think a silent, vibrating mechanism on a

pager or cell phone would probably be acceptable to our people.

I think we said last week—I don't recall precisely, but Hansard will reflect it—that the table already has certain technology at its disposal that members don't and ought not to have. I would suggest that we'd certainly be prepared to look at the use of technology by the table—and by the Hansard officers, I might add; I even noted today that one woman was scribbling things down very quickly.

**Ms Churley:** I think we're reaching a consensus on technology by the clerks and Hansard.

Coming back to laptops, having read through some of the material, which I hadn't before the last meeting, and having talked to a few Toronto city councillors, who, as you know, have some form of screen—it's not a laptop. I'm not sure how it functions. It's wired. They certainly are in no position to communicate outside, but they have monitors. For instance, a motion that comes forward, resolutions, voting—although I think they do electronic voting, which I would not support in this context.

I'm thinking more about technology that would enhance our role in the Legislature, as opposed to technology that keeps us in constant communication with the outside world when we're there. I find myself rifling through paper Hansards when I'm looking for something, and I'm trying to find bills to refer to something. I would be quite interested in some kind of pilot project where we have access. I don't know the name, if anybody can help me; I forget, and I didn't bring my notes. It's not a laptop where you can communicate with the outside world. It's technology that can call up bills that you're dealing with. What are some other examples? Somebody help me out here. I think you get my drift.

**Mr Duncan:** Briefing notes?

**Ms Churley:** No, it would be internal. You couldn't bring in—

**Mr Duncan:** Briefing notes are internal. The government has their set of notes; we have ours.

**The Chair:** Marilyn, I think you're talking about legislative documents.

**Ms Churley:** Yes, I'm talking about internal Legislative Assembly documents. That would be an interesting pilot project. All our Hansards, which are in big piles under our desk, and bills that we're frequently rifling through—Legislative Assembly bills in order, which we now get in paper form. I think it would be very useful to have that kind of technology in the House. I would see that as enhancing our role and enhancing our ability to be efficient in the House.

I am not in support of a pilot project of a laptop where you can be sitting there sending e-mails back and forth to your staff, your family and friends, or in fact being able to surf the Net, anything like that, but some kind of system that would just be able to call up internal Legislative Assembly documents.

As I understand from other jurisdictions, that's being used quite successfully and has not, as far as I can see—and Lisa would know more than I do, because she's

studied it far more. It's been quite successful and really seems to have enhanced the role of the members in the Legislatures.

**The Chair:** Maybe we could just see, Lisa, if you can recall some examples.

**Clerk pro tem (Ms Lisa Freedman):** I think in one of the documents there is a chart that lists what the members have access to, particularly in American jurisdictions. It can be set up any way the members want. It could be set up simply to have House Hansard, committee Hansard, bills, votes and proceedings, order papers, and that's it. Members would have access to that day's order paper, to go back in the votes, to search Hansard, to bring up a bill. I was just talking to our resource from LIS. It could be nothing more fancy than simply a monitor on your desk—

**Ms Churley:** A monitor. That's the word I was trying to—

**Clerk pro tem:** —and a keyboard so you could do Hansard searches. But you wouldn't have access to—there is nothing to write, no word processing, no e-mail, nothing else. Anything is a possibility. It's totally up to the members.

In a lot of jurisdictions they have specifically decided not to have e-mail, not to have Internet access, but simply to have—what you're really saying is the House documents, the documents that are in all those binders under your desk every day, accessed electronically. Anything is a possibility.

**Mr Duncan:** Did the Clerk and Speaker not indicate last week that would involve very considerable cost? I recall that discussion came up, and they said there would be significant cost establishing a system like that.

**Clerk pro tem:** I'll flip it over. I think the main costs I had spoken to the Speaker and the Clerk about beforehand would be the actual cost of a laptop being provided to 103 members, which is a significant cost.

**Mr Duncan:** Plus the wiring to go into the House.

**Clerk pro tem:** As I said, anything is possible. There is, of course, a cost involved.

**Mr Duncan:** In many of those jurisdictions where that is allowed—for instance, I know in the statehouse in Michigan—that's their desk, that's where those folks work. We have all those things available to us in our offices, correct? And again, the tradition of the House is to—I suppose if you were just limiting it to internal documents with no way to have influence from the outside, but—

**The Chair:** I think if you, as a committee, want to discuss that aspect, we need to have more information—I'm coming back to you, Jerry, because I know you want to speak.

I don't think we can talk to the point about cost without knowing what it is. There's sure an enormity of cost in all the trees and paper and stuff that's printed. There certainly would be a one-time cost for wiring to install a system. But I think we need to know whether it would be less cost in the long run because we're not doing the printing and distribution of all that paper.

1620

**Mr Duncan:** You're assuming they'd get rid of the printing on paper. The experience in most other automation projects has been quite the opposite. I remember, 20 or 30 years ago, everybody was saying we were going to have a paperless society. What has come about is that we have more paper, because now we have hard copies.

By the way, I have a number of members who insist on having hard copies. I know I would, because I sometimes don't have access to a computer, let's say, when I'm on a train or flying back here and I want to read to a bill or something like that. I don't think for a minute that this would eliminate paper. I don't think we should confuse that. I think we would probably want to have hard copies of all that as well, as we do in so many other things.

**Ms Di Cocco:** It's—

**The Chair:** Just a second, Caroline. In fairness, I'm going to go back to Jerry.

**Mr Ouellette:** First of all, back to one of the comments in regard to other jurisdictions, I don't think they have the competent staff that we have, who are able to provide us with all the information on the system that they do. It works very well. I know the library—the research there—is open all the time when the House is sitting. We can automatically access information there, and the desks have been very efficient in their job. I don't know that we're going to see an increase there. Maybe we will, and maybe we won't.

The other thing I would say to the official opposition members—mind you, it depends on how you take it, whether you're a whip or a House leader. Immediate access and getting in touch with your members all the time is sometimes desired by members and sometimes is not, and sometimes it's desired by whips and sometimes it's not.

**The Chair:** You could say that—you don't have to make this a partisan committee suddenly.

**Mr Ouellette:** Oh, no. He could discuss it with his caucus.

**The Chair:** You could say that to your own whip and your own House leader.

**Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges):** Would you mind if I just ask a question?

**The Chair:** No, we would like you to.

**Mr Klees:** You've probably gone through this, but I'm interested in the objection to having access to outside information or being able to do e-mail on this monitor that you prefer.

**Ms Churley:** We've been through all this, you're right.

**Mr Klees:** I missed it. I'll read Hansard.

**Mr Duncan:** I'll give you the Coles Notes version. The history of the House is that members should be in there unfettered. That's why, among other reasons, we have a bar, a Sergeant-at-Arms.

The federal House doesn't even have the ability for staff to send in notes to members or ministers. If somebody is on the floor of the House, getting notes while

they're debating—like that Nortel commercial where the guy is giving his speech and it's actually somebody outside reading it.

From a theoretical perspective, that's been the parliamentary tradition which, last week, both the Clerk and the Speaker reaffirmed as being a positive tradition that continues to be reflected. The Clerk did note that a couple of federal ministers are now using BlackBerrys. We'd have very strong objections to that. Theoretically, a minister could have just a little computer screen and somebody in the other room reading him the answer.

By the way, the same thing could happen with us. We could have the Sierra Legal Defence Fund or whatever on-line as the minister is responding to our questions. The thought was—and if I'm not reflecting it accurately, correct me—that it could interfere with the proceedings of the House, it could influence the proceedings of the House, and the tradition of British Parliament, or Parliaments of the nature we have, is such that the members should be there free of influence. The irony was pointed out that today, for instance, any one of us can get notes sent in. That was the view at the time last week.

**The Chair:** Can I just ask you to clarify one other thing? You said that if that were to happen—I know we did talk about this last week, and I think we do have to go back to Frank, because he asked that for information. Maybe he has a question following; I don't know.

One of the aspects of people on the floor using a BlackBerry, a screen or whatever, is that they are puppets. But I also thought there was some reference last week that you are still the person who is delivering the spoken word. So whether the answer comes in a note or on a BlackBerry, you are still responsible for what you say in the House. You could say the people who send in notes are pulling the strings of ministers. The Sierra Legal Defence Fund or whatever lobby group is giving information can now send in notes too. So it's not exclusively a government thing. It's not just ministers who get information.

**Mr Duncan:** Absolutely, but—

**The Chair:** Just in summary to Frank, I think we did refer to that. It doesn't matter where the information comes from, or in fact how it comes, it's still up to the person who has the floor, is recognized by the Speaker and is going on record in Hansard.

**Mr Duncan:** But there is a reason why we can't even call witnesses to the House, why people in the galleries cannot applaud. They're not members. It's tradition, and it may be a tradition this Parliament wants to do away with. Our caucus would not support that. If you start doing that, then at what point do we start having delegations appear before us? At what point do spectators get to applaud? That's been the whole basis of our tradition.

The other point I did neglect to note, which I think a number of us concurred in, was not even so much about outside communication but the whole notion that there's not enough attention being paid by members in the House as it is now and this would potentially be a further distraction.

**Ms Churley:** Can I interject just for a second? I don't know how others feel, but I'm not interested in having an absolute repeat today of our entire debate last week. I regret that you weren't here, but I don't want to have that whole debate. We'll be here for hours. I'm sure the same questions were asked around television. It would be interesting to go back and look at that.

I would say, Frank, that we've already come to a certain agreement around having technology used in that way. To have that debate again would take some time. But just to let you know where we are now in the committee, we were discussing today the possibility of monitors, and I think there was a little bit more interest in possibly looking at allowing the clerks at least to use technology.

**Mr Klees:** Ten minutes ago I did say I'd be happy to read Hansard and not take any more time of this committee. I agree. I don't want to debate it.

**The Chair:** I should say that Frank is subbing for Julia, who had to leave.

**Ms Churley:** And welcome.

**Mr Klees:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Marilyn Mushinski is down to sub for Ted Arnott, just to explain what's going on. Caroline?

**Ms Di Cocco:** Just on the whole aspect of the purpose of the Legislature, I think keeping that at the forefront of this discussion is what is required. At the beginning of the day, we get a list of what's going to be happening in the House, the bills are there. One of my other concerns about even having monitors that just scroll up the bills or Hansard is that the glitches that happen in this technology that would totally impede us could happen a lot more often. I know it seems a bit archaic going through the actual hard copy, but it doesn't matter. You're not going to get a technological glitch happening where everything shuts down and everybody's stranded. You become so dependent on it.

1630

Again, I don't think it's going to save paper, going back to that issue. I've found that, for some reason, the actual paper grows exponentially with the technology. I don't know why, but that's the way it happens. Again, just to reiterate the position, I think that if we encumber the Legislature with unnecessary technology, to be able to listen and to debate bills, it could become more of a distraction than a tool that would assist in the purpose of the Legislature. I really believe that profoundly, and in the discussions we've had in our caucus, people who actually believe in those ideals, if you want to call them that, believe technology is not going to enhance that purpose. That's what I wanted to say.

**Mr Duncan:** I just want to make a comment.

**The Chair:** Marilyn first, and then you.

**Ms Churley:** I was going to make a motion, so perhaps he could go ahead.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Dwight.

**Mr Duncan:** I did want to address the television thing. I know you were here as member, Margaret, and I was here as a staffer. Just to remind folks, it was almost

40 years after television became available in mass markets that the House adopted it and—

**The Chair:** I thought he was going to say it was 40 years ago.

**Mr Duncan:** It feels like it some days, Margaret. But there had emerged a consensus that it would enhance, and there is still a debate on about that. We had a little exchange about that, and Margaret quite rightly pointed out that there's a lot more strutting and I said there's a lot more sobriety. So it's been positive and negative. One only need attend night sittings.

**Ms Churley:** I think that Frank may have been more on my side with this. Clearly from the discussions last time and this time, I would like to see us try a pilot project with monitors. Recognizing that there are fiscal issues, and with revenues going down in the province right now, I would like to leave the door open at another date; I'm pretty clear that it's not going to happen now through this committee.

I would like to move that the clerks and Hansard, if they so choose, come forward to this committee with a project proposal for a pilot project to use technology in the Legislature to help them serve the members.

**The Chair:** Would you include researchers or anyone else who is an adjunct to the work done at this desk, in terms of committees?

**Ms Churley:** Absolutely.

**Mr Duncan:** I think they've been using them all along, haven't they?

**The Chair:** They have.

**Mr Duncan:** Yes, that's what I say.

**The Chair:** They don't all use them, but some use them, and I think we should get that point clarified.

**Ms Churley:** It would be researchers and clerks of committees as well. OK.

**Mr Duncan:** I agree.

**Mr Ouellette:** A modification on that. Just in case there's some further discussion on that, could we see if there's a separation between committee and Legislature when that's reviewed as well? Some may be opposed to use in the Legislature when they may be supportive of it in committee.

**Ms Churley:** You mean members?

**Mr Ouellette:** Yes.

**Ms Churley:** OK. I'd support that.

**The Chair:** Well, wait a second.

**Mr Ouellette:** When the proposal comes forward—because she asked for a proposal from the clerk's office to do the research—to make sure it's not for both, that there's an option available that committees and the Legislature could be separated if need be.

**The Chair:** Are you going to allow silent pagers?

**Ms Churley:** I already use one from time to time. It's silent. Nobody knows. Yes, I think we're all in support of that, aren't we?

**Mr Ouellette:** No.

**Ms Churley:** OK. Well, we'll have to have a vote. Does somebody want to make a motion on silent pagers?

**Mr Duncan:** Hello?

**Ms Churley:** You're not allowed to talk in front of them.

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion on the first motion?

**Ms Churley:** Do you want to read it back to us? Speaking off the top of my head, I don't think my wording was all that coherent.

**The Chair:** I can't hear.

**Ms Churley:** I'm leaning way back, that's why.

**The Chair:** No, it's OK, it's the—

**Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre):** It's just that he keeps putting this Marilyn's mike on, that's why.

**The Chair:** It's the traffic noise too, with the window open, which we need.

**Ms Mushinski:** It's just confusing to have two Marilyns.

**Ms Churley:** Yes. Even more so since I've gone blond.

**Clerk pro tem:** It would read something along the lines that legislative staff be allowed, be welcome, to come forward to this committee with a pilot project for the use of technology to help them serve the members in the committee and in the House.

**Ms Mushinski:** Or just that legislative staff bring forward a report.

**Mr Klees:** So this motion does not limit the technology to just a monitor.

**Ms Churley:** No, because the members are now out of the equation. It's for clerks, researchers and Hansard.

**Mr Klees:** That's all?

**Ms Churley:** Yes, because the support isn't here. People have gone back to their caucuses. You could make a motion if you wanted and have it voted on. In the interests of consensus here, I didn't make one on that, but there's no reason why you couldn't if you feel strongly about it. I'd support you.

**Mr Klees:** I'm sorry I wasn't here. I should have had myself subbed on to this committee a long time ago, I guess, because I am extremely interested in this, particularly from the standpoint of making a member's life a lot more efficient in today's world. I'll read Hansard, and I won't take a lot more time of this committee. But I'm extremely disappointed that we would have had this discussion, and if we're going to do a study or a pilot project or ask for recommendations, that the members' lives in here won't be included in that research.

Frankly, I didn't hear—perhaps I missed it—about members of this committee coming back for a full debate. I know we had some documentation delivered to us with some questions on it, but I don't recall the full debate from our caucus. That, in turn, would have been reflected here at the table. If I missed it, then that's my problem, and perhaps it's because I didn't have much help from technology to help me actually deliberate on this properly. I would prefer that you make that motion not to exclude members, because there may be some aspect of technology that would in fact benefit others. If

we're going to go through the process now, why not include that?

**Ms Churley:** If I may, what I'd like to do, if it's OK with the members, is vote on my motion, which clearly distinguishes, because there are different feelings on the matter. I think everybody's in support of my motion. We should vote on that, and we deal with the members' access in a different motion.

**The Chair:** Joe, do you wish to speak?

**Mr Tascona:** Yes. From our party's perspective, certainly information and detailed research that was provided by the legislative clerk was presented at caucus, and information for members to indicate their interest was requested. There wasn't an overwhelming response. But of the ones that were provided, which were very minimal of the caucus, there wasn't really a strong sense of going that route. If Frank wants, I'm fully prepared to give him what I've got. I just got some today; there weren't too many, I can tell you. That's all I can say in terms of there being a full opportunity for that information to be shared. It was shared, and an opportunity for response.

**The Chair:** OK. Then we'll take the vote on the motion that's on the floor. All in favour of Ms Churley's motion? Against, if any? That motion is carried.

**Ms Churley:** Can I ask a question? The matter of having technology in the lobbies: there's no rule for or against that, is there? Suppose a caucus wanted—I assume we'd have to pay for it out of our caucus budgets—to have a laptop or a computer in our lobby. Could we do that out of our budgets? Is that already a possibility?

**Clerk pro tem:** The information I can provide is that there are drops in the lobbies that can be hooked up to computers and from time to time—I don't want to say what goes on in one lobby or the other—there have been computers in the lobbies. I would probably say, before I check, that the caucus would provide its own computer, but there are drops in the lobbies.

1640

**Ms Churley:** And so we wouldn't need any permission. Is there any process? It has already been done, so should we choose to, we could do that without any kind of motion or—

**Clerk pro tem:** I don't want to give you a definitive yes, but from my understanding I don't believe there's a problem, and I can get back to you immediately if I find out there is.

**Mr Duncan:** I can watch your computer for you.

**Ms Churley:** I'll pay you to do it. No secrets there.

**The Chair:** Because I've been asked, we need to deal with silent pagers—at the moment, whether or not people are using them, they're still illegal—in order to protect everyone who is using them and may want to use them in the future, if we're making a blanket decision on technology, and we haven't even made a blanket decision on electronic voting. We focused on these hand tools so far in our discussion. I guess we can assume we don't want to get into any other technology, but we haven't named

any other technology and I do feel that, as far as the pagers, because they are being used, we should legitimize them once and for all, as long as they're silent. Marilyn?

**Ms Churley:** I'd be happy to make a motion that we allow silent pagers in the Legislature. Speaking to that motion, I make it on the basis of the fact that people are using them. Since we have not nearly enough but more women with children in the Legislature—that's not to say that men don't have a concern too—women need pagers in the House to keep track of their kids back home more and more, and we're doing that.

I try not to use one for work-related purposes, but there are times, of course, when you've got it and you do, but it gives a certain comfort when you're leaving your family behind, for them to know and for you to know that they can contact you immediately if there is some kind of problem.

**The Chair:** One of the arguments I promised I would relay for the record, because that point had been brought up, is that a lot of rural members don't have staff down here who can run notes in to them. Some of them don't have an office with a staff person, so they have some preclusions on how they're able to function without a pager.

**Ms Churley:** They function without staff?

**The Chair:** No, they have the staff, but they're not here all the time. Dwight?

**Mr Duncan:** I personally don't have an objection to a silent pager in the House, but as I indicated earlier, this is one question that I did not caucus and I'd like the opportunity to do that.

I do know that several of our members have them and have them on in the House, but again, to be candid, I did not raise this specific issue. I'd like the opportunity to do that, and then I can give a more informed opinion. We've dealt with the laptops and we've dealt with the difference between the table and members, but this is one question we didn't specifically deal with. I don't personally object, but I'd like to get some direction from my caucus before I commit ourselves to a position.

**The Chair:** Marilyn?

**Ms Mushinski:** We have to be careful on this issue. I can recall a member on our side of the House had a silent vibrator in his desk—

**Mr Ouellette:** No, no, we're talking about pagers.

**Ms Mushinski:** —and it went off.

I just wanted to liven up the discussion here this afternoon a little bit.

It was a pager that was also a vibrator, and he had it right in his desk next to the mike. You wouldn't hear it normally, but because it did vibrate it made this very funny buzzing sound and even though it was a silent pager, he did have it confiscated. It did disrupt the proceedings a little bit. So I think we should be quite clear in our language when we speak about pagers and other technologies.

**The Chair:** Like non-intrusive.

**Mr Duncan:** I wouldn't support—what are they, BlackBerry's, BlueBerry's?



**Ms Mushinski:** You wouldn't support non-intrusive vibrators?

**Mr Duncan:** I wouldn't support the use of those things you can send e-mails with, you know. They're not laptops. What do they call them? BlackBerrys?

**Ms Mushinski:** Right, I've seen the little BlackBerrys. But do they make a noise?

*Interjections.*

**Ms Mushinski:** They don't. I thought BlackBerrys made a noise.

**Mr Klees:** They do.

**Mr Duncan:** Yes, but my concern with them is, again, the two-way communication.

**Ms Mushinski:** I've opened up a can of worms. I apologize for that, Madam Chair, but we did need to add a little levity to this discussion, which was getting a little dull.

**The Chair:** Just for your information, BlackBerrys are the same as pagers. You can put them on an audio or a silent mode.

**Mr Duncan:** Yes, but you can also send e-mails with them.

**Ms Di Cocco:** They have a tremendous amount of—

**Mr Duncan:** Capability.

**Ms Di Cocco:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Joe, you put your hand up.

**Mr Tascona:** I haven't canvassed silent vibrators with the caucus, so I'm not going to be able to comment on that. I'm open to do that. I'll say this: if we're focusing on the silent pager, I didn't get a sense from the caucus of any great interest in that either, but it's for the members of this committee to discuss.

**The Chair:** Well, shall I assume—Marilyn?

**Ms Churley:** I'd be happy to withdraw my motion. That makes sense. And I haven't canvassed that specifically, although I think my caucus would be in favour of it.

Marilyn Mushinski raised the issue of exactly what we're talking about: a silent pager. It seems to me we need to make that distinction. It's important, because Dwight brought up the issue of the BlackBerry, and its capabilities go far beyond being a pager. We need to distinguish between that and a silent pager. I'm not sure any more exactly how we're defining a silent pager, then.

**The Chair:** We're intelligent enough that I think when you come back from discussing that I think when you come back from discussing it with your caucuses, if you choose to make a motion it should be emphasized with an adjective, "non-intrusive" or, you know, "silent"—

**Ms Churley:** But if I may, the point that Mr Duncan brought up—I wonder if we could have an answer to that question from our expert here. What would you say is a silent pager that could be used in the House that cannot communicate with the outside world, cannot accept or receive e-mails, basically is just a pager?

**The Chair:** I would say to the government members, we would like to introduce this gentleman to you as to who he is and why he's more than capable to answer this question.

**Mr Andrew Kleiman:** My name is Andrew Kleiman. I'm from LIS. We support all the members' computer equipment throughout Queen's Park and the constituency offices.

There are two types of pagers. There's a one-way pager and a two-way pager. A one-way pager is just a simple pager. You get a numeric message or it will just beep saying you've got a message. A two-way pager would be like the BlackBerry device that you can respond back to a question or to an e-mail, or it can actually have a pager number. So there are two types of pagers and they're both silent.

**Mr Duncan:** Just on that, Margaret, that's why I specifically talked about a device's ability to communicate two ways. For instance, my cell phone, as I'm sure most of yours do, has a vibrate function on it where you can, instead of a ring—I mean, we all use them; we're out in public. We do need to be very careful about how we define. I'd have no objection to a device that signals that you're needed in your office or that flashes a phone number to call or something like that. But, again, I think we have to be very careful about our definition.

**The Chair:** OK. Marilyn, you had your hand up. Do you want to say something?

**Ms Mushinski:** I was going to say that's exactly where I got the word "vibrator" from, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** All right. Let's agree then that you're going to go back and take a consensus of your caucuses. After you've done the consensus on that matter, is the committee satisfied that that's as far as you want to go in discussing any other technology, whether it's electronic voting or anything else? There's a whole realm of subjects that can be brought before the committee, and I think we need to decide whether we want to go further on something we haven't discussed or not.

1650

**Mr Duncan:** There is one issue. I know members kind of nodded in agreement when I raised this toward the end of the meeting last week. There is a notion that more and more cable services in the province are not carrying the legislative channel. That is of some concern. I know the Thunder Bay area can no longer get it, certainly not in real time—that's more of a computer term—as it's happening. I've heard from others that this is an issue. I wonder if, as part of our deliberations, we could ask for a report on the various areas of the province—I guess it depends on the cable provider—and if it might not be appropriate for this committee, on behalf of the Legislature, to recommend to the Speaker or directly go to the cable providers to see about the amount of coverage the Legislature gets.

The other issue that members of our caucus have raised—and again there's no consensus on this, but I will put it on the table—is that that station sits idle whenever the House doesn't sit, save and except committee. There might be alternative uses for it. Again, I'm thinking out loud and I don't want to take too much of the committee's time, but those issues have been raised with us.

**The Chair:** The expert in that area is Bill Somerville. You could either invite him to come to the committee or

ask him, in a preliminary way, to give us a report on the status quo as to what's been happening with the depletion in the number of cable companies carrying the channel.

**Ms Mushinski:** Just one point: my sense is that they're in violation of their CRTC agreement. It's my understanding that through licensing there are requirements to put on some kind of community channel that broadcasts, if not a local council meeting, then at least have the parliamentary channel. I would like that to be investigated as a part of any inquiry into why cable television is actually reducing political programming as opposed to increasing it. I think it's very detrimental to the community to be denied that kind of information.

**Mr Duncan:** Just one other point on that: for instance, in the Toronto market, it's not just the live coverage. If you want to see a repeat of question period on a week-night, in Toronto you can get it in French on TFO, but you can't get it in English.

**Ms Mushinski:** You can get it in French but you can't get it on TVO.

**Mr Duncan:** We've got this equipment, we've got this technology, the broadcast ability. I assume there would be costs associated with satellite time and so on. Maybe we can make better use of it and have better reach, but I do believe that's something we should look at.

**Ms Mushinski:** I am getting complaints from constituents since Rogers took over the Shaw programs. Shaw actually broadcasts a lot more political programming than Rogers. When we look at that, we should look at the disparities between the cable companies as well, I believe.

**The Chair:** Let's get the report from Mr Somerville, and then that will give us the ammunition as to how to make the next step to the cable companies themselves.

**Mr Klees:** Could we ask that the report be specific to the cable companies that have either cut back or are not carrying that? Also, it may be that they carry it, but they're carrying it at 2 o'clock in the morning. That is just as good as not carrying it. We should have a specific report as to who is, who is not, and when they are.

**The Chair:** If someone else, Lisa, could give us, in addition to that information that Mr Klees has requested, the clarification about what the licensing requirements are from the CRTC.

Do you want to end the meeting at this point in terms of technology? I'm anxious that we get into the other area of enhancement of the role of private members, the second part of the referral in the motion from the House, which has the broad scope of all kinds of areas that may enhance the role of private members. You know how quickly time goes by. If we've got four weeks left of sitting before—or three weeks—after next week it's three weeks.

**Ms Churley:** Then God knows when we'll be back.

**Mr Duncan:** The House doesn't have to be sitting for this committee to meet.

**The Chair:** No, I know it doesn't, but I think if this committee is going to have to do some—but that's the

best part; we can meet whenever we like, which is another question I really want to canvass the caucuses about. We can see by the rotation that we haven't had any rotation from the NDP or the Liberals—

**Ms Churley:** Nobody's willing to rotate with me.

**The Chair:**—but Thursday afternoons seem to be a bad time to hold these meetings. I would like you to think about another meeting day rather than Thursday afternoon. Also, if we're going to do some homework in the recess, we need to have done some homework before we adjourn, which is two and a half weeks of sittings, possibly.

**Mr Duncan:** Can I suggest, Madam Chair, that, first of all, I'm not in a position to discuss that today. Again, we were focused on the technology thing. Perhaps the first week back after constituency week would be appropriate for the subcommittee to meet and begin to narrow it down. Rather than keep all members here for that kind of discussion—as you know, I'm anxious to deal with that part of it, and we're prepared to sit when the House is adjourned or prorogued. But I'm really not in a position today to discuss those things. I will, however, be in that position the week following constituency week.

**The Chair:** As to what areas we would look at under enhancing the role of private members?

**Mr Duncan:** We'd be prepared to discuss all that at the subcommittee level, yes. The House resolution, as you're aware, is relatively broad. We're interpreting it in a broad fashion. We'll be in a better position when the House resumes after constituency week to offer our input into what, how, when, where. I think we've already talked about why.

**The Chair:** Does anyone else have any comment about how we should approach the other part of the motion from the House as to the responsibility of our work?

**Mr Tascona:** I don't have any difficulty with what Mr Duncan is proposing for now.

**Ms Churley:** I support that as well, but I would agree that we should be prepared to do it the week after on the subcommittee level, and we can scope down, all of us representing the conversation with our caucuses. It will make the discussion at the committee level easier and hopefully more efficient.

**The Chair:** Could we have a subcommittee meeting on the Monday and still have a regular committee meeting that week?

**Ms Churley:** It's OK with me. I don't know if you can.

**Mr Duncan:** It's OK with me. I suspect, based on our discussions at subcommittee before, there may be some difficult issues that we need to resolve. But, yes, we're prepared to do our best.

**Mr Tascona:** I thought you had to get a consensus from your caucuses. Is that going to be possible if we meet on the Monday?

**Mr Duncan:** If we meet on Monday it won't, no.

**Mr Tascona:** That's what I mean.

**Ms Churley:** That's true.

**Mr Duncan:** I guess you're right. It would have to be late Tuesday or Wednesday.

**The Chair:** What Lisa will do is call your offices and try to schedule the subcommittee meeting. Can I also ask her, as the pro tem clerk, to call the subcommittee members to find out if there is a time on Monday or Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning or Wednesday afternoon that we could move this meeting to, from Thursday afternoon?

**Ms Churley:** We could do that in the interests of ending this meeting now. We have had the discussion and we know that the reason why we kept it on Thursday is because each one of us seems to have another conflict, except for Monday mornings, which is a problem for members from out of town. I've got the alternative subcommittee, and I forget what else. But it just seems that between all of us we weren't able to find another morning or afternoon when we're all available. I could support your attempting to do it, however.

**The Chair:** I didn't formally ask you, and I think we need to clarify that. I see that we have a lot of very important work to do and I am anxious for us to be able to get it done. That's all I'm trying to do as Chair. I'm trying to drive the agenda forward so we can start literally getting our teeth into what is our responsibility. We've never had an opportunity before to look at the enhancement of the role of private members. I really think we have an opportunity on behalf of all our colleagues to make a difference.

Is there any other business today?

**Mr Duncan:** Yes, it's going on in the House right now.

**The Chair:** Are you moving adjournment?

**Mr Duncan:** I move adjournment, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** All in favour? Thank you. Have a nice weekend.

*The committee adjourned at 1701.*

# CONTENTS

Thursday 8 November 2001

Use of technology..... M-49

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