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Wednesday 9 May 2012

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 9 mai 2012

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Standing orders review

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Examen du Règlement

Chair: Garfield Dunlop
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : Garfield Dunlop
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 9 May 2012

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The committee met at 1304 in room 228.

STANDING ORDERS REVIEW

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Hello, everyone. We'll call the meeting to order. Thank you very much for being here. We'll continue on with our Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, the committees section. How do you feel like proceeding at this point?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Guys, would you like to deal with the options we have laid out, or just the committees?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I thought we kind of agreed that the clerk was suggesting we do the committees and we move on to the other stuff, I think is what I heard.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. Let's go with that direction. Okay, Larry. Larry has some paperwork.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes, I seem to be drowning in paper here.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Have we all got it in front of us here?

Okay. So what are we looking for here, Larry?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Excuse me, Chair. Just before I start: What tab does this all go into?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): Tab 2, committees.

Only half of those are going to go into committees. Some of them that say "draft options" will be for the discussion afterwards.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Which one were you going to address, Larry?

Mr. Larry Johnston: We have several documents here. We just want to draw the committee's attention to some documents that were handed out last week as well as some from this week, okay? The two that you received last week: One is "Accountability of legislative officers," and that deals with provisions in which parliamentary officers are required to report to a specific committee. I can't find my own copy at the moment. Accompanying that document are two others: One is the Annual Review of the Budgets of the Independent Legislative Offices. This is an example of a report that is put out in British Columbia every year by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. That gives you a flavour for the kind of review of the legislative officers

that is conducted by that committee. The second accompanying document is from Alberta, which has its own Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, and it's the transcript for Wednesday, November 16, 2011, of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. Again, the transcript takes you through, and you can see the questioning and the treatment of the parliamentary officers. I believe they each had half an hour for presentation and time for questions etc.

The committee had talked previously about the possibility of making sure that all legislative officers had a committee to report to, which is not the case at present. As you can see, there is a variety of options by which that is accomplished.

I'll move on to the next document, which is entitled "Referral of bills to policy field committees." The premise here is that the consistent referral of bills to policy committees based on their subject matter is one possible way to foster the development of expertise among committee members. You'll see that there's a table on the second page which divides the Legislatures into those that refer bills that have received second reading to policy standing committees and those that refer bills to a committee of the whole House. You may be interested in how frequently bills are in fact referred to committees of the whole House elsewhere in the country.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Has everybody got that document?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes. We're just moving along here.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): "Permanent referral of business to committees"—has everyone got that?

Interjection: No.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: "Referral of bills to policy field committees"?

Mr. Larry Johnston: This is from last week.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I found it; I feel pretty good about myself.

Mr. Larry Johnston: The most useful contrast, perhaps, is to look at, say, the House of Commons, where most of the standing committees correspond to federal departments. There are no specific provisions that direct bills to specific committees, but most bills seem to end up in the committee whose remit corresponds to the subject matter of the bill. In Saskatchewan, there are four policy field committees that are established specifically

to consider matters, including most bills after second reading, that relate to the generally defined subject areas. There is also a striking committee that establishes which ministries and agencies are under each of these committees.

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The contrast, then, is with the jurisdictions that send bills to a committee of the whole House. In many of those cases, the standing committees are engaged in matters of inquiry rather than looking at bills.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Inquiries?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes, they may conduct inquiries, investigate topics—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: In committee of the whole House? I thought that's what I heard.

Mr. Larry Johnston: No, in the standing committees. In British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, bills tend to go to committee of the whole House for consideration. So any standing committees in those jurisdictions have other functions which are largely investigative or oversight—conducting inquiries etc.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Gilles?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sorry, I'm having a hard time hearing. "Tend to go to committee of the whole House," is what you said?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Not "can"? "Tend"?

Mr. Larry Johnston: They tend to.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So how do they do public hearings?

Mr. Larry Johnston: They don't have public hearings on bills.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, okay. Gotcha.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Unless it's referred to another committee.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I think what we need to understand is that for some of these jurisdictions their committee system isn't as old or developed as the one we have here. Todd just reminded me that Saskatchewan, until a couple of years ago, didn't even have committees.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Really? Wow.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): A smaller House, too.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Any comments from anyone else?

Mr. Larry Johnston: A document dated May 2, 2012, is entitled "Committees' ability to initiate business without an order from the House." This discusses the ability of committees to initiate business in the absence of an order of reference from the House or direction contained in the standing orders, such as, "The committee shall" etc.

For example, at the House of Commons, standing committees are empowered to study and report on all matters that relate to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments of government that are assigned to them by the House. That includes looking at the statute law relating to the department; pro-

gram and policy objectives; expenditure plans and effectiveness of implementation; and other matters relating to the mandate, management, organization or operation of the department as the committee deems fit.

Similarly, you'll find in Alberta that a policy field committee shall inquire into, consider and report on any matter referred to it by the assembly and may on its own initiative, or at the request of a minister, inquire into any matter concerned with the structure, organization, operation, efficiency or service delivery of any sector of public policy within its mandate.

Standing committees in Quebec, without special reference from the assembly, can initiate examinations of draft regulations and regulations; policy directions, activities and management of government departments; policy directions, activities and management of prescribed agencies; petitions; and any other matter that may be of public interest. Such proceedings are initiated on a motion by one of the committee's members, and such a motion requires a vote of the majority of the members from each parliamentary group.

In Saskatchewan, annual reports of government departments, provincial agencies and crown-controlled organizations, boards and commissions are deemed permanently referred to the policy field committees. Such a committee may examine each annual report referred to it and report to the House whether the annual report is satisfactory or unsatisfactory, report any lateness in the tabling of annual reports, and indicate if there are public bodies not tabling reports that should be. A public policy field committee shall inquire to consider and report on any matter referred to it by the assembly, and may, on its own initiative or at the request of a minister, inquire into any matter concerned with the structure, organization, operation, efficiency or service delivery of any sector of public policy within its portfolio.

If that sounds familiar, I think it has been lifted exactly out of the Alberta standing orders or vice versa.

Nova Scotia's standing orders also provide that a standing committee may study matters within its area of responsibility as outlined in the rules or matters referred to it by the House. It may also undertake studies on its own initiative.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Like standing order 111?

Mr. Larry Johnston: There's some similarity, yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It sounds to me like it's similar to standing order 111.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Presumably, by default it would be the committee majority that would decide, in the absence of any other.

Again, it's the same with Prince Edward Island. Committees are empowered to examine and inquire into all matters referred to them by the House. In addition, with the decision of a majority of their membership, they may meet to examine and inquire into such matters and things as the committee deems appropriate within the context of their responsibilities as set out in rule 95.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Excuse me, Larry. In PEI, how many members are there actually in the House? They must have a fairly small—

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Twenty-eight.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Twenty-eight? So they're only looking after 10,000 or 12,000 people each? Is that—

Mr. Larry Johnston: Almost like Ireland. Direct democracy—very personal.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): So a lot of people would have to sit on a number of committees.

Mr. Larry Johnston: You should also note—and we'll come back to this later—that the committees in Prince Edward Island are not examining bills. Remember, in all of the Atlantic provinces, these committees are not examining bills. They are primarily examining matters that they choose to initiate or are referred.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have a question.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Yes?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: All of these comments on how they're doing stuff is good, but without knowing the schedule of the Legislature, it's very difficult to put the real context to it. Committees can do a lot of work if the Legislature is not sitting, but the way we sit here, if we look at this, I think you're comparing apples and oranges. We need to know the schedule and the number of sitting days etc. before you could really assess these things—a good question being PEI, the number of members and how many days they sit.

Mr. Larry Johnston: They don't sit very many days in PEI.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: They don't do bills, either.

Mr. Larry Johnston: No. Their committees tend to sit at separate times of the year than when—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My fear is we may see one of these and say, "This is good," without knowing the impact, and we adopt it and then we find out that—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Absolutely. I was just trying to look at PEI as just a tiny place. We've got a number of cities in Ontario—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It's the same with Alberta. I'll tell you, they've got a smaller Legislature, they meet less often, and they've got a lot more time restrictions than we do.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Yes.

On this particular document—including Deb and Todd—have you got any comments or any suggestions? Donna?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm just going to share with you for the record that it is 27 members in PEI, 140,000 people, about the size of some of our ridings, and 5,000 constituents per member. Now you know why they don't sit very often. They don't have to.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): With respect to sitting time, you're right. The Ontario Legislature, with the exception of the House of Commons, sits more days per year than any other Legislature in the country. Even in terms of the Commonwealth, we're still way up there. If you look at the number of hours we actually meet, we're also very, very high.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: So looking at all this additional stuff, we need to put that in a relative context.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Deb, can I ask, from the Clerk's perspective, looking at that sheet there, do you see anything that jumps out that you'd like to see adopted or comment on? I just thought we'd go around with everyone on each one of these sheets as they come forward to see if there's—I'm not hearing a lot of comments on change here, just on what's available to change.

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The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Some of the things that I think it would be worthwhile looking at are things like having the policy field committees, in particular, consistently deal with matters that relate to that policy field, for reasons that I've already stated. It develops an expertise on the part of the members, so it makes the committee much more knowledgeable when they're dealing with these kinds of things.

My sense is that there's some desire on the part of members to be able to self-initiate more discussions in committees. We talked a bit at lunch about altering the standing order 126 provision, going back to the previous provision where it came about as a designation from each member of the subcommittee, and then maybe massaging it a little bit to allow for the majority of the committee to expand the time allotted to that consideration. Those kinds of things, I think, would go a long way to allowing committees once again to initiate a little bit more of matters for their own consideration.

I think Mr. Balkissoon raises a fair point. You do have to be aware of how much time the committees have in general and whether some of this stuff is possible. I think you also have to take a look and make sure that committees understand that, at least in this jurisdiction, the primary role and responsibility is to deal with government legislation or matters referred to it from the House. But stating those principles, if you can come up with ways to allow for committees to self-initiate certain discussions, I think that would be a good thing.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Donna?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: One of the challenges is keeping this all in your head. What comes to mind, actually, is a little bit of what everybody is saying. For me, it's an Excel spreadsheet that actually says—and the reason why adding a policy committee sounds like a great idea, develop expertise, is it in addition to or is it instead of? Those are questions you can only answer when you know what you've got. So the number of days you sit, the opportunities to do this, what have you already got in comparison to—and we're picking on poor PEI a little bit, that they've got these committees that sound really good. But if they only sit for a month a year and they spread it out over—then they've got far more time to be able to devote to these sorts of things. Because it's not just time; it's people, it's bodies, and then it's human resources. It's the Larrys and the Trevors of the world, so it's a broader—

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): Thanks.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: You're welcome.

Interjection.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Then there's an expectation around the consultation process and stuff.

Again, I think this is wonderful work, and I really like the previous chart because it actually laid it out, but I'm thinking what we need is an Excel spreadsheet that speaks to the whole picture so that we have some idea, when we are doing comparisons, that it is actually comparable. I use that because I remember when we were down in the Midwest states and raving about how great some system was, only to discover that they didn't sit at all. If they sat, it was a couple of days a year. They didn't have an office; they lived in their cars. Their assistants sat beside them in the Legislature because they didn't have an office. We just assumed it was very similar to what we had when it was actually poles apart. It was easy for them to do a lot more things than it was—mind you, they had to get elected every two years, so it's slightly different.

So I wondered if that could be taken into consideration. Don't do it if you think it's so onerous that it can't be done.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I think the big picture thing is important. Without getting too radical, the committee might want to also give consideration—we do spend a lot of time in the House, and as my colleague says, a really disproportionate amount of time with those high-level debates in the House and—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: High-level? How do you measure it?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I guess I didn't—I won't even—

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: We're just teasing.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I was just joking.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):—and maybe not as much time as we ought to in the sort of more detail-oriented discussion of policy in committee. So what you may want to take a look at is, how much time do we really need in that? I mean, if you think of it as the plenary, where even upfront and follow-up work is done in committees—those committees report to the plenary—then you might think, “Well, maybe we don't need quite as much time in the House,” and that would free up members to do more committee work.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Steve and then Bas.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks, Chair. I just want to go back to some of the things you've said, Madam Clerk, because I think very strongly that we should have a system where committees not only deal with legislation, but as individual members, we need to be able to strengthen our ability to propose, study and draft legislation on a particular topic at committee. Whether it's a move to go back to more the wording that we used to have—I still think, on a principle basis, that's the type of committee system that I want.

It's great that we've got the overview of other provinces, and I think we've always—since we started meeting, that's one of the things I think is good, that we've

had sort of that top-level view. But at some point, we have to get down to the concept, and I think, in my opinion, we have to have that availability, so if I'm on an individual committee, I should, as an individual MPP, be able to propose or study or draft something that we could discuss right there on a topic that's of interest.

Mr. Larry Johnston: I've heard members talking about wanting to do this. What I'm trying to suggest to you is that other standing orders have found a way to do that, whether it's in policy field committees or other kinds of standing committees.

You take the example of British Columbia: They strike nine standing committees under the standing orders. Those committees don't actually do anything unless they get an order of reference from the House. So you can have a standing committee on education that hasn't met in this session on Parliament, a standing committee on aboriginal affairs that hasn't met in this Parliament, because it's wholly dependent on the terms of reference being supplied by the House.

So when I talk about policy field committees that can initiate inquiries, we're going to the other end and saying, “What is the ability of committees elsewhere to initiate their own business, and does that provide any opportunities for the members to consider whether or not that's something they would like to pursue, in part or in whole, and what are the ways that they do that, whether it's simply strengthening 126 or looking at other options?”

Mr. Steve Clark: I just want to make it clear too that I have no interest in having a committee that just sits and does nothing. I think that serves no purpose whatsoever.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Unless you get paid, like they—

Mr. Steve Clark: No, I don't even want to get involved in that discussion.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Bas has a question, then Donna, and I've got a comment too. Bas?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Chair, I'm just wondering: We have a process today, and I'm wondering if we'd probably get closer to what we want to do if we hear from everybody about what is their concern with the current process. Then you could look at alternatives.

The other thing is, I hear what Mr. Clark just said, and even with that, when I look at the Legislatures that are of a reasonable size, none of them have, if I could put it, a free hand other than PEI, and as we discussed, PEI's schedule is—it's a very low workload.

If you look at Saskatoon, it has to be at the request of a minister. If you look at Quebec, it has to be a vote of the majority of the members from each parliamentary group. Nova Scotia: It didn't say anything, so I'm not sure what it says.

But I think we might be able to land on something if we hear what everybody has as a concern. To be honest with you, I'm sitting here, and I don't know about my colleagues, but we're all sort of digesting things. We have to go back to our own caucus and say, “Here are some of the ideas. What's your opinion?”

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Donna had a comment, and then we'll go back. Thanks, Bas.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Actually, it's not a comment; it's a question I'd just like to ask Mr. Clark, or maybe everyone. The idea here is that you wish to have the opportunity to initiate an agenda item; presumably somehow it has to go through some sort of process. But my question would be: To what end? What for?

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Typically, committees are here to do the business of the House, the business of government. Yes, I appreciate the whole issue around trying to find something that's of interest to the individual, but individually we don't have the power; collectively we have the power. Is that not correct? So to what end is this issue around the individual having the opportunity to initiate something that's just of interest to that individual? Again, presumably a majority would have to support that, but to what end is the purpose, and that's—

Interjection.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Again, does it get reported back to the House? What's the reason, other than there's an individual interest? There currently may not be a mechanism that permits it.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Well, back when standing order 126 was standing order 123, the process was that each member of the subcommittee on any of the policy field committees could identify a matter for consideration, could say, "The committee should consider X," as long as it fit within their policy field. Then there was a 12-hour time limit imposed on that consideration. What the result was, out of a number of those committee considerations, was a report that went to the House—and in some cases, some very good reports; and in some cases, the government picked up elements of those reports to enshrine in legislation.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: If I may, if a committee was a policy field committee on the environment, for example, then an individual member had the authority, under the previous, to initiate discussion or a paper based on a majority, I guess, of the people saying in the committee that it was okay to do?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: No?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Each member of the subcommittee had an opportunity once in a session to identify a matter for consideration, and then the committee would schedule 12 hours, usually in between its consideration of whatever else it had referred to it from the House—

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: No voting or anything?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: This is 126?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: No, it's 123. It's the old 123.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Oh, the old 123, not the current one.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: So as long it fit within the policy field—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):—of that committee. So if it was social policy, for

example, it had to deal with health, education, community and social services—something that would belong within the mandate of one of the ministries referred to that committee. Then it had a 12-hour time-limited period in which it could consider that matter. Then it would culminate in one of two things—I almost forgot this—it would culminate in a substantive report going to the House or a committee bill going to the House. The Association of Former Parliamentarians, which you're all familiar with, was created that way, out of a 123-designated matter in committee, and it came forward to the House as a committee bill. The Chair of the committee introduces the bill, and then it goes through the same process as any other public bill.

Now, what happened, then, was—and this is kind of what I was trying to go over at lunch—there was some discussion among members that the 12-hour time-limited period was sometimes, not always, too restrictive, so there was a desire to maybe expand that. But then in return, because they didn't want to end up with committees spending an inordinate amount of time on something that may be political, they changed that 123 designation to make it a designation that required two thirds of the majority of the committee. Since that time, we haven't really done one.

So what I'm suggesting is, if you wanted to pursue that, and going back to the more original rule of 123, where each member of the subcommittee, for example, in whatever time period you establish, could choose a matter for consideration and put the 12-hour time limit or whatever time limit you want to back on it, and then also say that in circumstances where the committee or the majority of the committee—two thirds, whatever you want—decides they need more time for consideration of that matter, by motion they have the authority to do that. So what that does, then, is solve the problem of when a committee finds out that 12 hours just isn't enough. They can expand the time, but it also allows for the individual members of the subcommittee to designate the matter.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: If I may, Mr. Chair, did House business take precedence or did it just slot in wherever?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Usually, the committees just organized the schedule so that they—I mean, they were fulfilling their responsibility to the matters referred to them from the House.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: First?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Well, as well as. If it—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Gilles had a question, and then Steve.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, just a comment to pick up on the Clerk. It was never used as a mechanism to slow the government down. That was not the point. The point of 123 was to give caucuses, by a selection of one—remember, there's one member from each caucus on the subcommittee, so essentially, every caucus had an ability to make one selection under section 123 in the various policy committees; there were only three of them. So it

was never really used as a way of slowing the government agenda down, because all you'd be able to do is slow it down for 12 hours, and you get through that pretty quick. What they were successfully used for is that the caucuses in opposition to the government would bring forward an issue that they thought was relevant and important, there would be some work at committee to work it through, to bundle it up, to get people interested in it, and then governments often said, "Oh, not a bad idea." So the government would then pick up the idea. It was a way of being able to bring to the Legislature, hopefully, if the government chooses—it's always the government's choice—an idea that was born from committee. That was the idea behind it.

I think what the Clerk is saying as far as the history of it is correct. Where I would sort of lie is that we'd go back to the 123 with the caveat—I would put two caveats. One is, you can only extend upon a motion of the committee by the majority—that protects the government, quite frankly; and the other part would be that I wouldn't do it per session, because there might be only one throne speech in four years. So I think you need some mechanism to allow those types of things to happen once a year, or some mechanism.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: When was 123 changed to 126?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It was during the Harris days, essentially, because the government—as the Clerk explained, there was a sense that there wasn't enough time in 12 hours to get it done. That standing order change was made to remove the 12-hour restriction, but for the government to protect itself, it said, "You can only get one with two thirds."

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Sorry, just so I get it in my head, how often did the government meet and how often did the committee meet?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The committee had a structure similar to what we have now, and it had nothing to do with House time; it had to do with committee time. In response to Mr. Balkissoon's point, what did that mean for the House schedule? It meant absolutely nothing.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Well, right now, committee time is very limited.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: House time.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It's House time, also. My understanding previously is that committee had time; they also got paid for being on committee and they did a lot of extra work in between sessions. You can't take one piece of it and say it will work.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But in fairness, Mr. Balkissoon, what we're trying to suggest here is that, in fact, we empower committees to do work. There should be more time in committees and, quite frankly, less time in the House for this place—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: And that's one thing we've got to look at.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And when we look at that, it allows us to say, "All right, the old 123's ability to meet

in the summer or the winter session"—it allows the committees to do their work in a more meaningful way.

Mr. Steve Clark: Can I just jump in? I agree with that concept and I understand why you're perhaps a little reluctant, right? But I think we have to talk about some concepts as part of the basket of projects we go back to our caucuses with. I don't know whether my caucus is going to agree or not agree, but from a concept basis of empowering a member and making committee work more meaningful, I agree 100% with the Clerk.

Now, whether it's to agree on a concept, it's a majority; to extend it, it's two thirds—whatever that mix is, whatever that final recommendation is, we can talk about it later. But just solely on the concept of being able to empower a member to bring a matter that could ultimately become legislation—I think the Clerk's made some good points.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Don't get me wrong. I'm not objecting to it. What I'm saying is, we've got to look at the House schedule along with this idea that it's workable. In my mind, from my colleagues' standpoint, most of us backbenchers who sit on committee and all of the cabinet ministers—you remove them from our caucus so you're looking at a smaller number of members to do—

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: You should have tried it when we were nine.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But, Gilles, you have two here; we have four. So when we take the number of members that are available and divide them by four, the workload kind of goes up significantly, and the time available.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Donna?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I do think there's merit to what you're suggesting, but I guess I'm also going to play a little bit of the devil's advocate here, inasmuch as it's the subcommittee that will bring forward the suggestion. So the ideal would be that I would go to the subcommittee that represented the committee I sat on and say, "I'd like this issue brought forward." That's the ideal. I suspect that the government will decide what idea I want to bring forward, no more than your caucus will do exactly the same thing.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The caucus is whipped.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: So it's not that an individual member gets to bring forward; it's really the caucuses that get to bring forward what they consider topical at the time.

While I like the concept, the reality check might be a little bit different, and then I guess that's my means to an end.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Gilles, and then Deb.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm open to the idea if we can figure out some other mechanism to trigger it—I hear what you're saying. But I just want to tell you that when we did have, it was actually—yeah, it's the that caucus decides, but I never heard complaints from any of the members in opposition or in government that the pick was the wrong one. Normally it made some sense. It was

actually quite a good process. But I hear your point, and maybe there's another way of looking at it.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Any other comments? Oh, I'm sorry. Deb.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Can I just clarify something? I think you asked about whether government legislation took precedence. Currently standing order 126 says, "Such study in the committee shall not take precedence over consideration of a government public bill." I'll have to check, but I think that was a carry-over from the old one, 123.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: So government business does take precedence—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I do remember. It was that if the committee had no government business, you could do a 123. That's the way it used to be. I would argue that you don't want to do that. You need to give caucuses or members, whatever way you do it, an ability to bring issues forward so that you can—oh, look at that.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: And the thunder rolls.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: See, I spoke and the sky broke. I'm stopping at this point.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It's going to rain on your parade, though.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It might rain on my parade. You notice I stopped before it rained.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. Deb, have you got anything else?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No. Do you want us, in much the same way as we've done with the documents you have now on members with disabilities and opposition day, to kind of rough something out for you so that you can take a look at it?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have a comment on a discussion that went on at lunch.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just before we go any further, what tab is that document that you gave us on opposition day and all that?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Trevor, you've got to number these things.

Interjections.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Sorry, I didn't mean to divert the discussion. I was just saying that if the committee wants us to kind of rough something out on the 126 issue, we could do something for you to look at so at least you'd know what it looks like.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I think if you draft it and give us the number of sitting days back then versus what we're doing now, it might be relevant.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Oh yeah.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): So, Bas, what are you asking for?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The Clerk is going to give us something on the old 123 versus the new 126, but I would like to see the number of sitting days, and was that the time the committees were paid to sit extra and whatever, because I think that—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): It wasn't that far back. It was post the per diem, and we'll give you the stats on the number of sitting days—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Just give us the stats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):—but it hasn't changed a lot.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just want to be able to understand it.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. Does anyone have any comments on this particular part of the report?

Okay, Larry, next section.

Mr. Larry Johnston: The committee also expressed interest in provisions that permit standing committees to meet at the call of the Chair or otherwise conduct their business during periods when the House is not sitting. You will see on the first page of this memo that there is a table.

Interjection.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: What is it entitled?

Mr. Larry Johnston: It's dated May 7 and it's entitled "When Committees May Sit."

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, has everybody got it?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): All right. Go ahead, Larry.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Mr. Clark says that it may be dated May 9.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): May 7 on the second page.

Mr. Larry Johnston: The first column of the table indicates whether or not an order or leave of the House is required to sit during adjournment. You can see, in the majority of cases, it is not required.

In addition, I would clarify, with respect to BC, it is required to the extent that any committee meeting in BC requires an order of reference from the House, but that does not stop a committee, once it receives its order of reference from the House, from meeting during the time of adjournment.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm lost. Do that again. So the majority of committees are able to sit without an order of the House in the intersession? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes, that's what I'm saying. If you'll note, there are four instances where they may sit while the House is prorogued. In one of those cases, it only applies to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Now, whether they do or do not, is another question, and I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Which means to say people don't abuse it.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): What do they do when the House is prorogued, though? They actually—

Mr. Larry Johnston: They are empowered to meet during the time the House is prorogued, and in some cases it may be that there is a committee which functions

much like the Board of Internal Economy does here, but it's a standing committee of the House, which then has to be able to meet during that time.

The point on British Columbia, Mr. Bisson, was that committees can only meet in BC if they have an order of reference from the House.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just like us.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes, but—no, to the extent that we have permanent orders of reference—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no, I'm talking about the inter-session.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes. No—well, let me back-track. They can't meet if they don't have a reference from the House, even when the House is sitting.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, I see.

Mr. Larry Johnston: If they have an order of reference from the House, they may sit, and they may sit during adjournment as well. They don't need a separate order to meet during adjournment if they have terms of reference that have been given to them by the House.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So provided that they're constituted and sit, they can sit whenever?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Well, yes, but the membership is constituted in the absence, in some cases, of an order of reference from the House. So there is a committee, it has membership, but it doesn't sit.

Basically, in all of these instances you see that an order of the House is not required to sit during adjournment. The second column indicates those jurisdictions where an order of the House is required to sit while the House is sitting. This would be explained in those small Legislatures, where there are not enough bodies to have committees sitting while the House is in session, so in some cases, the standing orders preclude committees sitting, unless there is permission given by the House. Now, in practice, in some of those jurisdictions they do meet while the House is sitting—obviously, they get permission to do so—and in some of them they don't meet, and there's no overlap between the period when the committees are sitting and when the House is sitting, with the partial exception of a Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): To be fair, though, Larry, that really is the same situation as here. The motion that we pass at the beginning of the session that authorizes committees to meet with a certain schedule is the motion that authorizes committees to meet when the House is in session. It's just one large motion at the outset.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Right.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yeah, because we strike committee membership and all that at the same time. We actually say the days as well, don't we?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes. So how would we be different? We're not any—

Interjection.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Well, the default option here is that committees don't sit while the House is sitting.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no. I was just asking myself a question.

Mr. Larry Johnston: You also have a document dated May 8, 2012, called "Permanent Referral of Business to Committees."

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: Where's that? Is that another document?

Mr. Larry Johnston: It's 120093.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We're going to have to figure out a way to—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My next one is committee of the whole—okay, I've got it. I've got 091.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We'll make sure everybody's got it here before you start.

Interjections.

Mr. Larry Johnston: Permanent Referral of Business to Committees.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): I promise I will work on a different system for next meeting. I need you to know this. There will be colours or something. This is going to get easier, I promise.

Mr. Larry Johnston: This provides for the committee's benefit some information on those jurisdictions where there are provisions that refer business to standing committees on a more or less permanent basis. That can happen in one of two ways: a matter is or is deemed to be referred to a committee permanently, such as the permanent order of the Auditor General's reports to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts; but in many cases, this applies much more broadly.

There is a table on page 2—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm still trying to find it. I found page 1. Carry on.

Mr. Larry Johnston: The table on page 2 provides an overview of the types of matters that are or may be referred to these committees. The House of Commons, which you'll see during the notes that follow on pages 2 and 3, is very specific in the assignment of matters to committees.

In Alberta, you'll see that the review of estimates shall be reviewed by the policy committees. The annual reports of all ministries, agencies and commissions may be reviewed. They stand permanently referred, as do the reports of legislative officers, and the committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act must report to the assembly.

Where I've noted that there's a review of estimates, that's where the estimates are being reviewed in a policy committee, not in a specific committee dedicated to matters of supply.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): So right today, it's only with the authorization of the House that estimates could ever meet in the summer, right? Yes—a specific day. I remember a couple of years ago we met with finance because a minister couldn't make it during the spring session for a couple of days. But I personally have heard a lot of people say that some of these

committees should meet more often in the summer months. What's the feeling on that? You've mentioned estimates; that's exactly the one I was talking about, because that committee only starts 12 days after a budget, right?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Twelve sitting days.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): It's 12 sitting days after a budget before you can start estimates. It's got to be done by—

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): Third Thursday of November.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): —the third Thursday of November. So you don't get a lot of time for that committee to actually meet. So my question is: Is there some way we can streamline that? Is there any more discussion on that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, it's something we asked and talked about at lunch.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Yeah. Laura?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I think, if I may, that it depends on the purpose of the committee. For example, I sat on finance and economic affairs and you travel for pre-budget consultation. That time varies and it's always when the House is not sitting, at least for the years that I was on it. So I would say that it depends on what the committee is reviewing and what the purpose of the committee is. In the case of finance and economic affairs, it would be essential to meet while the House is not sitting. Otherwise, you would not be able to conclude your pre-budget consultations before the budget.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): I just think it's worth more of a discussion because I'm certainly—Donna?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It actually brings back to the issue around the validity of the House sitting as often as it does vis-à-vis the committees sitting more often to be able to do that more nitty-gritty work. I think that's where some of the discussion needs to take place. It's not so much that you—because you don't want to take away from constituency weeks for the obvious reason, especially for those who travel great distances. They need to be in their constituency. But on the other hand, I think we've all had an opportunity to witness in the House that it's not always the most productive use of time and it could be used more productively.

So maybe that's where part of the discussion should come in terms of how this occurs. I don't know that just jumping to the summer months is the answer. It may be part of the answer, but also, in concluding, just how much relevant time should be spent in the House vis-à-vis the committee work as a whole.

I don't think that should be just limited to any committee, but to committees as a whole. I mean, I don't know how sometimes you get all the work in—and I guess estimates is a really good example—and then you're struggling. It makes some sense to have the discussion about the validity of the number of days in the House.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Yeah. Deb, do you have any comments on that?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Todd does.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Yeah, go ahead, Todd.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Well, Deb and I were just spitballing a little bit. I mean, I think the House does meet more than it needs to and committees don't meet as much. There is that what's referred to as high-level, I think, "in principle" debate that takes place in the House.

One idea might be, every week preceding a constituency week is dedicated to committees so that the House would meet each day that week for question period and routine proceedings, but then the committees would meet the rest of those days and do the more detailed in-depth work that they really don't have the time to do now and that can't be done in the House. The overall amount of time that members would be working on legislative proposals would be roughly the same, and it could even be during the same days of the week and same weeks of the year as we currently have. It would just be weighted differently as between the House and committees—something like that.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Or better yet, instead of meeting three and a half days, we'd change it to two and a half, and the other day is committee.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yeah, there was a time when Wednesday was cabinet, caucus and committee day.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Lisa?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's actually an interesting option, what the Clerk just said.

Just further, Donna spoke earlier about what the experience in—I guess it was in the United States, where they don't sit very frequently. I know the experience in some other Canadian jurisdictions is they don't sit as much as us. Now, that's all well and good. I enjoy coming to this place and taking part in debate. That is how I think we will remain relevant in the long term: Because we are going to debate issues of the day. So I am not in favour whatsoever of collapsing the amount of sitting days that we could have in favour of more committee work. I think that I would prefer to see an opportunity for all of us to explore increasing the amount of committee work without affecting the amount of debate that we're able to have as private members. We have 107 MPPs. Some members perhaps speak more than others to legislation, but I very much believe my job is to bring my constituents' views to the floor of that assembly.

I actually enjoy, for example, member statements, which is something I'd like to talk about. Maybe we should increase that to two full minutes. I think that's a great way to create a public record for this province that, in 20 years, 40 years, someone can look back on and recognize the contributions of the people who made Ontario what she is. I would really urge the committee

not to go that route, to condense our sitting time, because I think that's important. We should instead be looking at the opportunities for us to sit, without an order from the House, during that period where we're not sitting after Christmas for six weeks and during the summer.

When I first arrived here, traditionally we did that, and I always spent a week or two on committee during those breaks. That hasn't happened in a long time. We're almost a full year, outside of committee, having sat either in the summer or in the winter intersession. I would really like to see us get back to that, but have more flexibility as committees and maintaining the level of debate. Whether or not people think that's quality—that's sort of in the eye of the beholder. That's not for any of us to judge in this House; that is for our constituents to judge every four years, or in the case before us, perhaps even a shorter period of time than that.

That is fundamental to what we are doing here, and I wouldn't want us to lose sight of that. I won't be in favour of any option that condenses our sitting period in the House.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): I understand. Donna?

1400

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Donna?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Yes, I was just using that as an example in terms of what happens in other jurisdictions, trying to put it into context. It wasn't suggestive of anything that some member may or may not say in the House. I do recall that in previous governments some of them sat 16 days in a session. So it's hit-and-miss; it's all over the place.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It all depends on your majority.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It all depends on your majority.

I think the issue, though, becomes how do we provide the best way we can to acknowledge the issues that are before us vis-à-vis individuals who wish to have a far more participatory role; validity of the committees trying to get their work done—one of the things we haven't done is very much consultation, in terms of getting out to that broader public, which to me is at times just as important, if sometimes more important, as debate in the House, because it is substantive to debate in the House once you hear from people in the community. Sort of balancing all of that out in such a way that it's relevant is where I'm coming from on all the committee work. I like the idea of having good consultation and using a wide range of that—to get out to be informed in order to have good debate. But there was no suggestion not to.

I think we should explore all options and then make a decision on what is relevant to all of us, not just to—I appreciate particular points of view, but I think it's worthwhile to look at other jurisdictions; I think it's worthwhile to look at how we can balance this. I know that at one time we used January extensively for that consultation period, and we haven't been able to do that for whatever reason. How do we get back to reaching out to folks?

All I'm suggesting is that we should throw it all on the table and have a really good look, and then decide what we think we could do to make everything that works in this House relevant. I think that's really important.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Steve?

Mr. Steve Clark: To what Donna just said, I agree that we should look at other jurisdictions. But I want to emphasize the point that Lisa made as well. I was a little surprised, as a new member: We were adjourning in June and we had planned to go up north in that week or week and a half, and it didn't happen. I just thought that we missed a great opportunity in those couple of weeks in June. And I do agree with Ms. MacLeod about the intersession in January and February: We do miss a tremendous opportunity to get out and talk about bills and have some meaningful committee work. So I agree that we should review those two options. To me, that's what we should be concentrating on.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): For that to happen, is there a motion every December on the last day to have the finance and economic affairs committee travel? How does that work, or is that just naturally done every year?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think it has always been done by the committee, was it not?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We didn't do it this year, but normally, leading up to the budget, the finance and economic affairs committee—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Those are the pre-budget hearings.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): The pre-budget. Is that a motion of the House? It's done every year like that?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): To authorize them to sit during the recess, yes.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, but only the one committee. They have to—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No. We've had instances where there's a long motion that authorizes a number of committees to meet during the recess for specific reasons.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): At the call of the Chair?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): It depends on when you're looking. Sometimes, yes, it has been whenever the committee chooses. Sometimes, more recently, it has been on specified dates.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): So they would lay out the dates you could—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): With finance and economic affairs, I think we did miss an opportunity this year. But it's nice to be able to have the option for other committees, if something comes up that they need to travel to certain things or locations or have meetings here at the House on a particular bill.

Go ahead.

Mr. Larry Johnston: If I may just add, that's partly what this memo is talking about in terms of the functions that are assigned to committees and whether or not they are required to perform those functions or just empowered to perform those functions. In cases where they're empowered, that often means there is the necessity for a motion from the House or an order from the House, as opposed to when they're required. Then the assumption is that they will perform this function, and if that's coupled with the ability to meet during the time of adjournment, then the question about getting an order or assigning particular days doesn't come up in the same way.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Yes, Bas?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: In the short period of time I've been here, I've been on, I think, two committees that worked in the break. It was always a struggle to find enough members to have quorum, because there is no commitment. Some members, depending on what committee you get on—I mean, all their breaks are taken up with committee work and other members get nothing. It is problematic, so we need to look at all of that. Is the commitment that members will show up?

I remember travelling with the justice committee, and I'm just going to give you—I'm not saying it happens all the time. Government members would show up, but the opposition party, in hearing the public, would have only one member. Then, when we got back here to finish our work, you started having ideas that were never out there when you travelled.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, I know what you're talking about. I've seen the same thing—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Or you have substitutes; you continuously have substitutes, so the corporate intelligence was never all in one place.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. Anything else on this one, then?

Okay, our options?

Interjection.

Mr. Larry Johnston: I just draw your attention to the last document I have here, which is May 7, 2012. It's the list of the last eight times that a bill was referred to committee of the whole House and reported to the House. Mr. Clark had asked for that last week. They're listed in reverse chronological order, and I leave it to you to make of it what you will.

Mr. Steve Clark: How come the government doesn't name bills as snappy as Mr. Flaherty did? I like that: Bill 17, Fairness is a Two-Way Street Act. That's snappy.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: So these are the eight times?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yeah, plus Mr. Kennedy's attempt.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, so we're now going to do the options. Todd, Deb, you're going to handle that?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): As we had agreed last week, I think, we've done up some

proposed wording. I think some of them might be pretty straightforward.

I'll start with the most straightforward first, which is this document that you've got that's entitled "Members with a Disability." You can see that there's some verbiage there that explains what the current practice is and what the issues might be with that, and then a proposed recommendation which would allow the Speaker to make accommodation for any member who has a disability so that we don't always have to go to the House to get unanimous consent. It could be a situation as permanent as somebody like former member Mr. Malkowski, where we had to make arrangements for sign interpretation full-time, or it could be something as temporary as the most recent example of Ms. MacCharles having to vote from her wheelchair. This just avoids the potentially embarrassing situation of a request for unanimous consent not being given.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Would this wording be, I guess, clear that it's acceptable to the member who has the disability? What about if something is proposed and the person says, "No, that's not what I want"?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This just allows the Speaker, if I read this right, to move forward, should they request it, without having to—I see what you're saying, and I think we all agree that what we don't want is, at some point, a member not wanting to recognize a member with a disability. Look, I was there in the House of Commons when Rob Anders decided to deny unanimous consent to make Nelson Mandela an honorary Canadian. These things happen, folks. I think this is effectively—well, it does, and it could be very embarrassing to the chamber, as that instant was to the House of Commons. So what you effectively want to do here is provide the Speaker with the option of moving forward without going to the House.

1410

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But my question was: Does it have to be done to the satisfaction of the member who's being accommodated?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Well, I think it has to be done to the satisfaction of both: The House has to be satisfied and the member being accommodated. I can't conceive of any situation where the Speaker would not work with the member requiring the accommodation—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, I just asked that question because you could have disagreement.

Mr. Steve Clark: But we have to allow the Speaker to make those decisions, and if there's an issue, there has got to be a mechanism to bring it back. It's a pretty easy common ground to move forward on.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: As an example—and we haven't had a member who has to come into the House every day with a wheelchair or whatever, but I've seen the public come to this building and complain, "Yes, there's wheelchair access, but it's very cumbersome."

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): But that's a different—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But you could have the same complaint from a member: Yes, there's wheelchair access, but it—

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a different issue, and the issue's got to be the member. Then the other issue is, if you want disability access to the chamber for visitors, if we've got issues, then let's deal with them.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): This is really dealing more with allowing a member who may be in a wheelchair to vote from a seated position, to speak from a seated position, rather than having to stand, as the House has allowed by unanimous consent on a number of occasions already—or when we have a member who has a permanent disability, to allow the Speaker to make arrangements, before the House even begins, to allow the full participation of that member. This is really just dealing with the participation of a member with a disability in the House.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, no, I understand that. I'm just saying, are we prepared to make sure that the member's accommodated?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I think the issue sometimes becomes apparent when there's a different interpretation of what "accommodation" means. Is there some specificity that it's required from either the Speaker or the individual, or do you just hope that they work it out in good conscience, or do you actually have to say that it meets the requirements of both? Because there have been situations where some people think a ramp is right and other people say, "No, I need an elevator," you know what I'm saying? That's an accommodation issue. That's what I think the question was all about, and whether or not there's enough degree—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Or it could be a blind person; it could be a hearing-impaired person.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Steve?

Mr. Steve Clark: But again, when I hear that issue and read the recommendation "permit the full participation in the proceedings," I think it again puts it on the Speaker's side to make that decision.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But the way it's written, it's his judgment.

Mr. Steve Clark: Or her.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Yeah, his or her judgment call as the Speaker. I'm saying you could probably have a participant who is a member who just says, "This is not enough for me."

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): So Clerk, would it be possible, then, to alter that "in consultation with the affected member"?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): If the committee wishes. I mean, ultimately, it's the requirements of the House that need to be paramount. Again, I can't conceive of a situation where the Speaker wouldn't consult with the member in question to determine what the level of accommodation needs to be, but you do have to understand, ultimately, the final word has to rest with the representative of the House, who is the Speaker.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Mr. Bisson had a question.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That was the point that I was going to make: I don't think we need to write it into the standing orders. The Speaker is not going to go out and do this stuff on his or her own, as the Clerk just said. I think we need to recognize that Speakers are pretty responsible when it comes to utilizing their authorities in the standing orders. So I would be less concerned about how the Speaker accommodates because the Speaker is going to have—if it's a question of money, there may be an appropriation. He or she would have to go to the board etc. There are various processes there in order to allow this to happen. I would err on the side of allowing the Speaker to make that decision.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): And actually, can I just maybe clarify a little bit? Because if we use the most recent example of the back-bench Liberal member who required the use of a wheelchair, the installation of the—we have that temporary ramp was done entirely on the Speaker's direction. That didn't require the House to provide unanimous consent because, in our view, accommodating a member's ability to get in and out of the chamber—there's no question. The consent, though, was required to allow that member to speak and vote from a seated position. So it was only with respect to the further participation of that member in the House, not the actual physical accommodation.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: May I add, giving the Speaker the authority to make that decision could end up depoliticizing such a decision. Because let's say that for some strange reason there's some crazy politics going on between the caucuses or there's a particular dislike on the part—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): It certainly wouldn't happen with this current class.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, it could happen in any class. It just seems to me to depoliticize it by giving it to the Speaker; he or she makes the decision and he or she is not going to be frivolous in those decisions.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But my concern wasn't with the Speaker having the authority, my concern was making sure that the member is accommodated to the member's satisfaction.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: And in the event that there's a difference of opinion, whose final decision?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: If that's the case, let's say that I'm the member and I feel I'm not accommodated and the Speaker's not accommodating me. I'm going to go talk to my House leader, who's going to talk to the other House leaders, who are going to go talk to the Speaker and, if need be, are going to move a motion by unanimous consent, right?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just raised the issue.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): All right. So we're heading to the next question here where we need some guidance: opposition days.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yay. Love those.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Everyone loves opposition days.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have a comment.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Sure. Take it away.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I know this was discussed over lunch, and I read this when I got it and I made some notes to myself. In looking at all statements by ministers, all these other things, all parties have equal treatment. I don't have a problem with the party that's moving the opposition day motion having that reply, but if I look at all other debates, the replies are restricted to two minutes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No. If you look at the standing orders, the minister who moves the bill has a right of reply. It's not like a two-minute—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Well, I'm asking.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): It could be up to 20 minutes for a minister's right of reply. A minister or parliamentary assistant has up to 20 minutes' right of reply.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's not like a question-and-answer thing. It's not like response of the debate. A minister moves a bill. The minister or their parliamentary assistant has a right of reply of 20 minutes. I think the point here is that we're certainly not going to give, on an opposition day motion that's only going to be two hours, a 20-minute right of reply. That would make no sense. That's why the suggestion of five minutes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Steve and then Donna.

Mr. Steve Clark: So if I understand, the recommendation that we've talked about is, rather than a 10-minute bell, have a five-minute bell and then give the mover of the motion that five minutes. Is that correct?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Yes.

Mr. Steve Clark: To me, that's a no-brainer.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just raised the issue of the two minutes on the consistency of it. Since I've been here, I haven't seen a 20-minute reply; have you?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Donna, then Gilles.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I don't have an issue with the reply thing. It's more the issue around the five-minute bell, to be honest with you, just to get people here. I don't have an office here. I've never had an office here in nine years. I'm in the Whitney Block or Hearst. I can't get here in five minutes. So I have an issue with the five-minute bell. That doesn't mean that every day I'm sitting waiting for an opposition day motion. Anyways, for me it's the timing.

Now, I understand that lots of votes have taken place after 6 o'clock. That has happened in the past, but that's not typical. But when you put the 5:50 on there and then definitive five and five, I think it actually restricts access for the members to get here in time, given how widespread they are doing other things.

Tracy MacCharles, for example, could not get there in five minutes. In 10, she could get there if she was in committee, but she could not get there in five minutes,

and she's a person with a disability. So I just question the five minutes. I don't have any problem with the reply.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): We'll go to the Clerk after we speak with Mr. Bisson—I think you wanted to—and, Steve, did you want your name on the list?

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: I hear your point, but I would just say two things; there are two ways of dealing with it. One is, first of all, on an opposition day, we all know when the vote's going to happen. It's going to happen at 5:50 or—you know. But you know it's going to happen at a particular time, so you organize yourself. But there are other ways of accommodating a 10-minute bell, and we can ask the Clerk to give her recommendation.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Clerk?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): To be honest, this was one of the issues, after the committee had a discussion about opposition days and when we had a discussion, that was of concern. Part of the reason for the 10-minute bell currently is that—maybe not part of the reason; maybe the only reason—that is a non-deferrable vote. There are other bells that you'll notice are five minutes; anything during routine proceedings, for example.

Typically, if a vote is deferrable—

Interjection.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): So the 10 minutes was put in there as opposed to five minutes for that reason. It's a non-deferrable vote, so you have to give time for members to actually get to the House for the vote. It's not always clear that the vote is going to happen between 10 to 6 and 6 because if, as happened yesterday, a party doesn't use its full allotment of time, it could occur at a time that's unexpected. So that was really the rationale behind the 10-minute bell in the first place.

That was of concern when there was discussion after the committee talked about it among ourselves, and that's why there's an additional provision in this that says, "All right, then make the vote deferrable." If you make the vote deferrable, then any party, using the same arrangement it uses now for any deferred vote—any whip of any party can cause the vote to be deferred and taken up at deferred votes on the following day.

By putting that in, it's a fail-safe, so that if there's any whip who says, "Jeez, there are going to be people from my party who can't be here," that vote can be deferred.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Steve, you had a comment. Anyone else—

Mr. Steve Clark: No, she just made it. The Clerk just made it.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Okay. So what's the—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Just one comment

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Okay.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I hear what the Clerk is saying and it makes a lot of sense, but take, for example, yesterday. I know it's a scheduled vote and I will show up. I'm

next door. We have some members—their offices are down on University, or Bay and College. But when it happens earlier, it is now left upon us as the government members who are not here—and our House leader or our whip is clued in that we're not going to make it back. If you said to me that if the vote is going to take place other than at the scheduled time and it's an automatic deferral of the vote, then it makes it a lot easier.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): We could do that too.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Because a lot of our members have been caught not making it back because they're coming from elsewhere.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): In other words, what you're saying is, if the question is going to be put earlier than—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Than 5:50.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):—than 5:55, if you allow for the five-minute—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Or whatever, yes.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):—if the question is put earlier, that vote is automatically deferred.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Mr. Bisson, then Ms. Cansfield.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would disagree. I would argue two things: One, if the vote is going to happen earlier, as it was yesterday, then there's room for a 10-minute bell to deal with that. The bigger issue is the right to defer the bell. Every whip in every party knows where their members are. They're on committee; they're out at meetings—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Not always.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Listen; I was in government. I worked in the whip's office. I've been there, done that. Here's the rule: When in doubt, defer. If I'm the government or I'm the opposition, but mostly the government, and I'm in doubt that I'm going to have my members there for a vote, I'm going to defer it because I want to make sure my people are there.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But yesterday, to be honest with you, all of us were not aware that the debate would collapse early, and it did.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): So if you had this standing order, this would have allowed your whip to defer that vote.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: If he's aware his members are not going to make it back.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Mr. Balkissoon, Ms. Cansfield did have her hand up.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: The bells are ringing here, so I'm getting my head around—

Mr. Steve Clark: Is it a 30-minute bell?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Yeah, these bells.

If you go back and you think about it, you get a 30-minute bell for deferring debate, right? You get a 30-minute bell for deferring adjournment. You get a 30-minute bell for deferring second reading, right? And

you get a 30-minute bell for deferring third reading, but you only get a five-minute bell for an opposition day motion and then you want to defer it. So I'm having trouble with my bells here. Why? Because that doesn't hold for the argument on a deferrable because you've got two that already take 30 minutes to defer.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): You've also got the time allocation motion, which allows for a 10-minute bell and it's deferrable.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: So there's room for some adjustment in the—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Let's be fair to each other.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: And the bells.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: And the bells. My issue is just getting people there in time to be able to vote—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It's a government issue because our offices are not here.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Mr. Clark?

Mr. Steve Clark: So then the question is, if I move an adjournment of the House at 20 to 6, the bells ring until 10 after. So if this suggested motion was changed to say "a 10-minute bell"—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would argue against it.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm just asking. So what would be the net result if you did a 10-minute bell, still allowed us to defer—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But it's the early collapse that will cause us a problem.

Mr. Steve Clark: But again, it goes back to what others have said. You could still defer the vote.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But the thing is, our whip does not always know where members are.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Hire a new whip.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Our House leader does not always know where—

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm going to send Hansard to him. I'll send him committee Hansard.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Any more questions on this to the Clerk?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I think it should be a 10-minute bell to just allow people the courtesy of getting—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It's either an automatic deferral or a 10-minute.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): You can, as a committee, decide on whatever time for the bell you like. The only reason that we put in the five minutes was to allow the right of reply for the mover of the motion or his or her designate. So if you're going to stick with the 10-minute bell, then you might want to consider how you allow for that right of reply within the time. Maybe you reduce the overall time for each caucus and take the two minutes out of that and allow for the mover of the motion to have—something like that. Or maybe two minutes, much like you do with private members' business.

The issue around the 30-minute bell versus 10 minutes or five minutes is, you can't predict with any degree of accuracy when a motion to adjourn debate or House is going to be moved, nor can you necessarily predict when

debate will collapse on second or third reading of a bill unless it's time-allocated; and if it's time-allocated, the bill is shorter. So that's why it's different.

With opposition days, you know, within at least a couple of hours, when that vote is going to occur. You knew yesterday that there was going to be a vote. That's why the differentiation in the time limit on the bell.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Okay, Ms. Albanese and then Ms. Cansfield.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: This may be very simplistic, but if we allow for the 10-minute bell, could not the debate end five minutes earlier, at 5:45?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Then everybody will have less speaking time.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: But we allow the five minutes for the mover.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Or we put it in, the party that moved it, in their time so that they know that they have equal time.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Or we put it in that time, yeah.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Mrs. Cansfield and then Mr. Schein.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: The only other option is that I guess you could defer automatically all opposition day votes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Just a second. Mr. Schein, are you—

Mr. Jonah Schein: No, I would ask to speak after

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): I see; okay. Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think the reality is, there are plenty of occasions where we would agree that we actually want the vote to take place. So to Mrs. Albanese's point, I think she's probably right in her approach. There are two hours for an opposition day motion, and within those two hours we'd take into account the five-minute right of reply. End of story. I think it deals with your bells and it deals with the other thing. I think it's an easy way to deal with it.

I think you want to give the whips the opportunity to say, "We don't want to defer this. We want the vote now." There may be some reason that the parties want to do that.

You still get your 10-minute bell.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: If I may, you could reduce the reply to two or three minutes and then put it in the other way. There are a few places you could go on this, right?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What's that?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Typically, the reply has only been two minutes, right?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, no.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Except for ministers, up to 20 minutes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's 20 minutes for any bill.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: But no other member, just a minister, can take up to 20, or everybody can?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister or parliamentary assistant.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Can take up to 20, but nobody else can.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Because it's their bill. See, the idea is, it's the minister's bill. The minister has listened to the entire debate and may choose to respond, or the parliamentary assistant may choose to respond, to what was said in the debate. So: "As a result of the debate, I would like to talk about the following when it goes to committee. I'd be interested in doing the following things," blah, blah, blah. That's why you get the right of reply of 20 minutes.

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A private member's bill is a much different issue, because it's less than a one-hour debate. That's why there's a two-minute reply. So I would argue five minutes or four minutes makes sense, as far as right of reply, and I'm with Mrs. Albanese: Work it into the time of the actual debate.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The existing time.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): And it is there. It's currently in the standing order.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, but I think what Gilles is saying is, let's make it mandatory that the mover of the motion gets the last five minutes, so the chicken situation is gone.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): That's to get away—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It's to get rid of the chicken situation. Put it in that the party that moves the motion, they're the last speaker and they get to speak for five minutes, and they have to save that out of their speaking time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No. What the Clerk was pointing out is that, currently, you can do right of reply. Yesterday, Andrea did a two-minute right of reply. She could have done four or five minutes.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Right, but you had to leave that. It was your option to leave the time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But here's the problem. They had time on the clock. She could have got up, she could have done a right of reply, and they could have got up and had the debate and that would have been the end. That doesn't give you right of reply to have the thing in the standing order as it stands now.

The point is to give the mover of the motion the same opportunity as a minister who authors a bill. How we do it—we can do it different ways.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Or through private members' business.

Do we have some direction for the Clerk here?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think we do.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm not sure, to be honest. I mean, I'm still stuck—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Donna, your issue—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Donna, your issue is the 10 minutes, right? The 10-minute bell.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: My issue is people getting there in time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, we'll give you the 10-minute bell.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): So if you change this to: "After two hours of debate on an opposition day held on a Monday, or at 5:45 p.m. on an opposition day held on a Tuesday or Wednesday, the mover of the motion may reply for up to five minutes," and then change the division bells from five to 10 minutes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yeah.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Then you're not altering the amount of time allocated to the opposition day.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Just to let people get there in time.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Yeah, that's fine.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Does that work?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That works. We can live with that.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Are we keeping the deferrable?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Put it in there for now, and we'll have to talk to our caucuses about whether we want to defer opposition day motions, because there may be some reasons we don't. I think it's there to be discussed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): All right. Why don't we endeavour, then, to send this back to our House leaders and move on to financial provisions.

Sorry, I did have Mr. Schein on the list.

Mr. Jonah Schein: As somebody new here, I'm listening more than I'm talking at this point. But last week, we spoke briefly about accessibility, and mostly for members inside the House. I've got a real concern about accessibility to this space for people outside of the House. We've talked very briefly about how we televise committee meetings and so forth. I'm curious to know from other people: Is there an interest in having a longer conversation about how to take what's really an obscure place and open it up to the public? I'll just give a couple of examples of what I mean by that, to see if people are interested and if this is the appropriate place to have that discussion.

For folks who have been here for a while, all of this makes a lot of sense, and it serves the purposes of people in here, but I think for people on the outside, it's very easy to lose the thread of what's happening. It's hard to understand what's happening on the inside. I think it's in the interests of the greater good that we make this place more accessible to folks.

Some things like that are very simple, things like—obviously, the committee process of having the public welcomed in to depute is very important, but how do we get that information out to people, for example? Are there better ways that we could make sure that people know they have an invitation to come and depute to committees? That's about notices.

But also ways about how do we—this would actually be a fairly radical suggestion, I think, which would be: Are there ways that we could summarize the debate? More people tune in to vote on American Idol than do in elections, but there are things that people do on those shows that summarize what's happening. What's happening in the House? So after a 12-hour debate, could there be three—you know, the use of members' statements in a slightly different way: This is our position, as one party; this is why we're supporting this bill; this is why we're opposing it. It would give the public some understanding of what's happening, and some way of then disseminating that information. Those are just a couple of comments.

To me, when we look at voter turnout, when we look at cynicism in politics, I think we're losing that thread in here. I think we're at risk of not reaching out and making that connection, and I wonder if there's a way that we could do that, to create plain language for people to understand things.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Well, you made some good points, and I know Mr. Clark would like to speak. Would anybody else like to be on the speaker list? Cansfield and Albanese?

Mr. Steve Clark: I just want to speak directly. As Mr. Schein was expressing his concerns, it reminded me of the clip that the Clerk and the Speaker play prior to question period on the legislative channel. It just dawned on me that we don't have that same clip on our own website, so that people could access that and then understand the live feed that takes place. I happen to think that's a very quick video clip that gives some credibility to, "This is done at this time of day; this is done in the afternoon." Again, it's one of my pet peeves, as I know you know, that we don't have a very robust folio of items on our website that would be able to cover committees and live stream some of those hearings that we have and that are going on right now this week in the Legislature.

We don't do a good job, but at the very least we've got the clip that's done that's played every day. To me, it should be very easy for us to put it into a video and pop it on the site. That would address some of Mr. Schein's concerns. I think it would be a pretty easy thing. And the Clerk does such a good job on it as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Okay, we have a speaker's list here: Cansfield, Albanese and Bisson.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much. Your points are well taken, but I think there's really a broader issue on consultation, process, how you go out and consult with whom, how, on what issues and how you use the digital far more effectively—the teleconferencing. We live in a digital age, and yet our communications really are more minimal than they were in the past. We're very instant with our BlackBerrys, but it's very internal as opposed to the external.

And you're right, there is a bit of apathy out there with respect to what goes on, and it's hard for people to come

to this building—I don't mean physically, but just to get here. It's much easier for a few people to go to where more are than a lot to come. Typically, what happens is you get a vested interest in a stakeholder here as opposed to the broader community, in some other ways.

I think it's a discussion that needs to take place in a broader context—how you use multicultural news media, how you can use the parliamentary channel or the Clerk, as was suggested by Mr. Clark. There's a whole host. But I don't know how or if it does fit into this. I think it's a discussion that needs to take place, but I'm not sure where, to be honest with you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): I think we've had a couple of these, where, "It seems like we should be studying this. However, is it in the standing order requirement?"

Have you concluded?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Yes. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Okay. Ms. Albanese and then Mr. Bisson.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I agree that it's a topic all on its own that would require a lot of attention, and rightly so, as you say for the questions of disability, but also questions of apathy of our voters in general. It goes back to communications and how do we communicate.

Talking about the parliamentary channel, for example, just as we were talking, I think that there is a need to modernize it and to make it more accessible. A few things that I could think of just as the conversation was going on here: Maybe the Speaker or the Clerk could do a one-minute wrap-up of the day: "Today we spoke about this and this happened in the Legislature." You could have tomorrow and another 30-second clip about what bills are going to be debated tomorrow, what committees are going to be debated tomorrow, what consultations are needed. You could have another minute blurb on "Did you know that?" and explain a rule. I do have a communications background and I guess I can offer some ideas, but these are just some of the few things that I think would make it more appealing, even for young people to watch and for anybody to say, "Let me see what's going on tomorrow or what happened today."

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): This is a pretty important discussion, so I think we're going to go through this and put off the financial provisions for next week. We still do have two more speakers, and I'd like to chime in, and then I'll give the last word to Mr. Schein on this. But Mr. Bisson, then Mr. Clark.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, just a couple of things. I think it's an important point. It is within the purview of this committee. It may not be within our motion that put us into the review but it is the purview of this Legislative Assembly committee.

I would just say a couple of things, not to repeat everything that was said. There are two assets that we don't use in my view. The first one is that we don't fully use the assets of broadcast services that are here. It would be pretty inexpensive to, in an innovative way, use

broadcast services to do some of the stuff similar to what Mr. Clark raised in regard to what this place is all about and what you can do to come to present at committee and all those generic kind of things.

The other thing that we don't use, quite frankly, is TVO and TFO. Those are paid by this Legislature. We apportion the dollars for them to operate, and the fact that they don't even run question period, for Christ's sake, I think is—I can watch question period at what time? At 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning? I know that because I wake up at that time of night and I see question period and I often watch reruns. But it seems to me that if we have public broadcasting, we should be a little bit more—how would you say?—engaging with the public broadcasters, both French and English, to be able to not only broadcast question period but look at some of the work that CPAC has done. CPAC has done some really interesting stuff on various issues—back to Mr. Schein's point—and I think it's something that maybe we should get into a little bit later.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): All right. Mr. Clark.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's pretty scary; I was basically going to say the same thing that Mr. Bisson said. Although it's not part of our standing order review, broadcast services is under this committee. When I became a new member in the last sitting, we did a tour of broadcast services and I found that was very good. It gave me, as a new member, an overview of what not only we do but what we can do. I think that is something that we should, as part of our committee—obviously, it's not part of the standing order but it's an important issue.

Speaking to TVOntario, I know that my predecessor had a very strong view about what TVO should cover in terms of our proceedings. I think they had the chair before one of these legislative committees and talked about that. But I can also recall, as a younger person, being able to watch—I think they always gave equal time. I think it was on Friday night or something, where every party got to do a little commercial on rotation on TVO. It was pretty interesting. I can remember turning on at the time—two thirds of the time I would turn it off—but that's again something that I think we should investigate. Thank you, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): I'd just like to thank you. I'll just contribute my own views before Mr. Schein wraps this up for his discussion. I agree that we should be addressing that issue in here. I think it's something we've all talked about over the years. I put forward my own resolution at one point about TVO and TFO being compelled to actually play our question period daily. That might be something this committee should pursue in the next months. I couldn't agree more; I think that this Legislative Assembly committee should be looking at how we broadcast our committees. In the last couple of days, we've had Bill 13 and Bill 14 in committee, where there's been standing room only and a holding room, and people can't watch the proceedings and who's speaking. It's sort of just this table. I think it

would be important for us to make the investment that (a) we webcast our committees and (b) that we actually make sure that we have the ability to broadcast the committee much like we would of 151. I think that's important.

The other point I just would like to make—I know I've said this before but I would like to reiterate it—is that I think that we do a disservice to the people that we represent all across of Ontario when we only have public hearings in Toronto. I come from eastern Ontario, as some other colleagues here do. We have northern members, like Mr. Bisson, and we have folks from the southwest. It's not always easy to come to Toronto. I think it creates a relevancy that our assembly is listening at our committee stage. I think we're underutilizing that.

Those are my points. Mr. Schein, would you like to wrap up?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Sure. Just very briefly, I'm glad that other people are interested in this. I would ask if we could actually spend an allocated time going beyond what we just spoke about. I would suggest, actually, that there are folks who have given this idea some thought, generally, and would be good people to bring in and present about this. I think ultimately bringing the public into this would actually force us to address some of the more structural issues around setting public policy, and I think the public would push us harder than we're able to push ourselves and see kind of a wider angle on this. So my request would be, could we allocate more time for this for longer discussion and could we bring in—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Public hearings?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Yes, somebody to speak to how to make this a more accessible process to the community.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): I'm going to let the Clerk speak, but I just wanted to point out that it's

a good idea. We should pursue it. But we have to get the standing orders done, as the order of the House suggests. Clerk?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I would just say that I would welcome the opportunity to have that discussion with the committee. It does have the mandate to look at broadcast and recording.

I just wanted to very briefly tell you there a couple of things we are doing. We're currently revamping the educational component of our website, and we're proposing to put on that interviews that kids are doing with some of the parliamentary players and to have that there to just make it a little bit more interesting.

The comment that you mentioned, putting that parliamentary process video on the website, we're actually going to take that away and probably do it, because I think maybe it's just something that hadn't occurred to us. It's easy enough to do.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Ladies and gentlemen, we have about 10 minutes left. We have an option to start the financial provisions and not finish it, or we can adjourn a few minutes early.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We should adjourn.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): Adjourn? We'll start fresh. This meeting stands adjourned until next Wednesday—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can I just ask, before we adjourn, one last thing? Can we ask the clerk to reorganize binders for next week in some sort of way—bigger, tabs, legend, all that stuff? Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Lisa MacLeod): The committee clerk will take that under advisement and do what's necessary. The meeting stands adjourned until next Wednesday at 1 p.m.

The committee adjourned at 1448.

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Chair / Président

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton PC)

Mrs. Laura Albanese (York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston L)

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River L)

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James ND)

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre L)

Mr. Steve Clark (Leeds–Grenville PC)

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord PC)

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough L)

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton PC)

Mr. Jonah Schein (Davenport ND)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Grant Crack (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell L)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Ms. Deborah Deller, Clerk of the Assembly

Mr. Todd Decker, Deputy Clerk of the Assembly

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Trevor Day

Staff / Personnel

Mr. Larry Johnston, research officer,
Legislative Research Service