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**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Selection of estimates

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 26 October 2022

**Comité permanent
des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Sélection des budgets
des dépenses

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 26 octobre 2022

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Michael Bushara

Président : Ernie Hardeman
Greffier : Michael Bushara

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Wednesday 26 October 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Mercredi 26 octobre 2022

The committee met at 0901 in room 151.

SELECTION OF ESTIMATES

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. On our agenda today is the selection of estimates for consideration.

On September 8, 2022, the Lieutenant Governor transmitted to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario the estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2023. Pursuant to standing order 62(b), these estimates, upon tabling, are deemed to be referred to the standing committees to which the respective ministries and offices were assigned pursuant to standing order 113(b).

The estimates for the following ministries and offices have been referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for selection and consideration: Cabinet Office; Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development; Office of the Premier; and Treasury Board Secretariat.

All committee members should have received an electronic copy of the 2022-23 estimates and the corresponding ministry and office briefing books from the Clerk.

The objective of today's meeting is to select the estimates of certain ministries or offices for review by the committee.

Standing order 63 sets out the process by which the committee makes its selections. Each of the recognized parties on the committee shall select the estimates of up to one ministry or offices in each turn. The official opposition selects first, followed by the government. If members of one party decline to make a selection, the selection then passes to the next party in the rotation. The process concludes when either there are no further ministries or offices available to select, or if both recognized parties decline to make any, or any further, selections.

Pursuant to standing order 63(c), these selections are to be reviewed in the order that they were chosen; however, this order may be altered by unanimous agreement of the subcommittee on committee business or by order of the House.

Pursuant to standing order 63(d), the time for the consideration of the estimates of each ministry or office shall be determined by the respective committee.

The estimates of those ministries or offices not selected for consideration will be deemed to have been passed by the committee. As Chair, I will report those unselected estimates back to the House, and they will be deemed to be adopted and concurred in by the House.

If supplementary estimates are tabled for any of the selected ministries or offices, those supplementary estimates would be considered by the committee during the same time which the committee decides to allocate for consideration of the main estimates for those corresponding ministries or offices.

In accordance with standing order 66(a), the committee must present a report to the House with respect to the estimates it selected and considered by the third Thursday of November of this year: November 17, 2022. If the committee fails to report by the third Thursday in November, the estimates and supplementary estimates before the committee will be deemed to be passed by the committee and deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

When making your selections, I would also like to add that if members could please look at the list of ministries and offices in the estimates book, or as displayed on the screen in front of you, and give the correct names of the ministries or offices when they select them for consideration.

Do members have any questions before we begin with the selection?

It's kind of a long preamble, but I wanted to make sure that everybody knew exactly where we're going to start from. No further questions? We'll start with the official opposition for the first selection. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's also worth noting that this is the first time that the new selection process of the standing orders has been used since March 2022. Prior to the change, I think the rules allowed for each party to unilaterally designate up to 15 hours of time to review the proposed expenditures and the selected ministries. While there is no longer a cap, I think it's worth noting that we are also very short on time, given how late the estimates were tabled and how we have a hard timeline of November 17. So the official opposition is actually going to be proposing to maximize the time that we have left. With that, I'll move the first motion.

I move that consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Finance be 15 hours in total and that until the time allotted for consideration—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Excuse me. We are strictly right now doing the selections—no other debate,

no other direction to the committee other than picking the ones that you would like to review.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Which I have to do by a motion, right?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No, you have to select the names and make sure we read the name directly from the—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. The official opposition's first selection is finance.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

Now, the government side: MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good morning, Chair. Good morning, Clerk. I select the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, we have two. Further, opposition?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The official opposition's second selection is the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. Government?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: There are no further government selections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. From the official opposition? MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: We'd like to select the Office of the Premier.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Very good.

The government side: Mr. Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: As I mentioned, there are no further government selections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. With that, did you want to select the last one, the official opposition?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I would. Thank you very much. We would like to select the Cabinet Office.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. That means there are none left to be selected, so that's the order. If we have time to hear them all, that would be the order that they would be heard in.

MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I move that the committee recess until 3:15 p.m.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a motion that the committee recess until 3 p.m.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Until 3:15 today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, people, before we go any further, I didn't read the whole list. There is one more on the list if the official opposition wishes to select it too. If not, we will close the selection process.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Chair. Then we will select the Treasury Board Secretariat.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, very good. That concludes all the selections. Is there any other business which members may wish to raise in the committee? MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: As I mentioned, I would move that the committee recess until 3:15 p.m. today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a motion to recess. Any comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Chair. The official opposition is happy to stay in this meeting and finalize the

selection process and the time allotment. We've come prepared to do that work. I don't see any reason why we do need to recess. We could actually complete the process so that we can respectively be prepared for the estimates.

It's also worth noting that this committee is allowed to meet any day of the week. In the original motion of the text that was tabled in March 2022, we actually are empowered to use the maximum time available for consideration. We have lost five weeks with the municipal election when the government decided to shut down the Legislature. We have very limited time to do this important work.

I just want to remind members of the committee, especially the government side, that these are the proposed expenditures for each government department, for each agency, board and commission. This is important work that we are embarking on, and I see no reason for us to recess until 3:15. Of course, the government has the majority of members and you can steamroll over this process, but honestly, let's go through the motions. Let's set the time allotment so then we can plan accordingly as a committee.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? No further debate. Call the question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Recorded vote.

Ayes

Byers, Crawford, Cuzzetto, Dowie, David Smith.

Nays

Bowman, Fife, Kernaghan.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The motion is carried. The committee stands recessed until 3:15.

The committee recessed from 0912 to 1515.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to today's meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. On our agenda this afternoon is committee business.

Are there any motions the members wish to raise? MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I move that, pursuant to standing order 63(d), the following time be allotted to the consideration of the estimates of the ministries or offices selected by the committee: the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for 2 hours; the Ministry of Finance for 3 hours; the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development for 2 hours; the Treasury Board Secretariat for 2 hours; the Office of the Premier for 1 hour; the Cabinet Office for 1 hour; and

That the ministers responsible for those respective ministries be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for the review of the estimates of the Office of the Premier and the Cabinet Office the government House leader be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for each ministry the minister be allotted 20 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members as a group of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the committee meet for the purpose of considering the estimates of the selected ministries or offices at the following times: on Tuesday, November 15 from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. until 6 p.m., and on Wednesday, November 16 from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That if any invited minister is unavailable to appear before the committee that the committee requires their parliamentary assistant or parliamentary assistants to appear before the committee in their place.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Discussion? MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We had motions proposing much more time for the ministries. It's actually very customary to have a minimum of 10 to 15 hours of discussion on the proposed estimates, and the minister has always been here. So it's a little concerning for us that the government is proposing so little time to review the proposed estimates, especially given the current financial situation in the province of Ontario and the current economic circumstances. I'd also say that at no time have I ever been aware of a minister not being able to attend a committee, or being compelled to attend a committee. Ministers obviously have a huge amount of responsibility to the crown and to the province. Calling ministers to this committee, in particular, is a major way for us, as His Majesty's official opposition, to hold the government to account and to demonstrate some financial transparency to the people of this province.

I would like to ask for a five-minute recess so that we can consult on the proposed motion that's before us. Given how late the estimates were tabled, given how little time we have until the November deadline—when all the estimates will be tabled because we will have run out of legislative time to review them—I would ask the government to give us a five-minute recess, Mr. Chair, to review the motion that has been put before us.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): If there's no objection from the committee, we would recess for five minutes for the request.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would object.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. The committee is recessed until 25 after—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Dowie.

1520

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Just a question—pardon my being new: In the past, has it been possible for parliamentary assistants to attend in place of a minister?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Repeat the question.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: In the event that the minister could not appear, historically—is this something brand new, that a parliamentary assistant would attend in place of a minister? Or has this been the practice before?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Generally, I think the timing was set around the minister, because not many ministers were being reviewed at all. I think presently the challenge would become that we could be here for a much longer period of time than has been standard. And I think it's important for the committee to recognize that the estimates, when they were longer for one ministry—that only one ministry in this time frame would be reviewed. Here, we're going the length of everyone on the list is being reviewed—so I think that would make it that we wouldn't be able to adjust the committee's time to meet every minister's standard. So I think that would be the answer to that question.

MPP Calandra.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'd just like to comment both on what PA Dowie has said and the motion on the floor, if that's okay, Mr. Chair. I think in your answer to the parliamentary assistant and, actually, in response to the member opposite's own query—there's the genesis of why we're having to move quickly, and that we don't have the opportunity to take five-minute recesses to consider.

You hit the nail on the head, Mr. Chair. Under the previous estimates process, we would probably get through the estimates of one ministry at the expense of all other ministries. Under the renewed process, with the standing orders that were changed by the previous Parliament, in fact what the Legislature approved was greater accountability in the estimates process and ensuring that we get through all of the estimates, if possible. This is certainly not something that, in my time as a parliamentarian here, has been done. Of course, other Parliaments in the country have taken the estimates process far more seriously, I think, than this Legislature has in the past and have taken up the responsibility that we have to follow through and make sure that, as legislators, we take a look at all of the estimates from all of the ministries. It's not necessarily a policy discussion—because that is made in the Legislature; it is made when a bill is passed—but it is an expenditure review to ensure that Parliament has full sight on what is on the costs. That is why I think the motion from the member of Peterborough is actually a striking one—because it gets through the ministries; it allows a fulsome accountability on all of the ministries.

I hear the member opposite that they—if I'm getting it from the member opposite, they want to have more time on fewer ministries. For us, I think that was a challenge of the last Parliament, that Parliament voted just wasn't good enough—that we had to get through the estimates process.

In a time when there is less time to actually focus on the estimates because of when Parliament returned, we're seeing at other committees, and on this one, with this motion, if the committee does support it—that we'll get through potentially six different estimates processes. So I think that is very, very encouraging. And I congratulate the member for the way he put this together, with respect to parliamentary assistants.

I did take the liberty of ensuring that parliamentary assistants could be here. As you say, it has happened in the past. In fact, in the last Parliament it happened. It is a backup mechanism to ensure maximum accountability is available to the members on the committee.

I'll summarize with this: It's one of the reasons, I think, why in the last Parliament, Parliament agreed to break up the committee process—so that there were more committees focusing on fewer departments, so that members could specialize in those areas. That's why Parliament, I would suggest, sent the estimates process directly to committees.

I think the member has put together a really good motion that is worthy of support. No disrespect to the member—a good member—but look: Let's deal with it, so we can get to the estimates, as opposed to a random five minutes. I've spoken for five minutes to give the member opposite time to hopefully reflect on what she wanted to do, and I'll leave it at that for now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. MPP Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the House leader for speaking fully for five minutes and giving me an opportunity to review the Hansard when you originally brought forward these changes, from March 2022.

It is worth noting, Chair, that this estimates selection process is the first since March 2022, when the standing orders were amended. Prior to the change, the rules allowed for each party to unilaterally designate up to 15 hours of time to review a selected ministry, and while there's no longer a cap on the amount of time available to review a ministry or office, time designated for consideration is now subject to a vote by the committee.

So what we are seeing here today—I have already publicly said that we prepared motions based on the ministries that we've selected, because we have serious concerns about where the money is going—or where the money is not going—under this government, and that has informed our selection of the ministries. To have the government and the member from Peterborough bring forward a limited time to review these ministries—what do we have here? We have two hours for the Ministry of Economic Development, three hours for the Ministry of Finance; we're proposing 15 hours. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development: two hours; we're proposing 10 hours.

The Treasury Board Secretariat: It's actually worth noting that the Treasury Board Secretariat budget, the actual from 2020-21 was \$1.68 billion, and in the estimates for 2022-23, it's now \$6.475 billion. There are very good questions that we as official opposition members have, to put to the government and to the minister responsible for the Treasury Board as to what this sudden increase is.

We have a huge amount of questions around the cabinet budget and the Premier's office. I mean, we saw a 30% increase in those expenditures. This is something that we take very seriously. That the government is proposing so little time, and that the House leader has said that this is a more efficient time—two hours here, two hours there, three hours there—I want to remind him that on March 3, he said to the House, in Ontario's Legislature, "What we've said is that there shouldn't actually be a time limit

for the investigating of estimates." And yet, today you just spoke in favour of a motion which limits our ability—our voices as opposition members, on behalf of the members from London and Waterloo—to hold the government to account. I have to challenge the House leader on your assertion that this is a more efficient or streamlined or even democratic process.

You went on to say, that same day, "We said that Parliament is too important, the role of members is too important to limit it, so we eliminated the rule which would see estimates only have a time limit of debate before it's brought back to this House." So you've said that you don't want to limit the work of this committee, and yet you are speaking in support of a motion that does exactly that.

You can understand, I would hope: If you were sitting on this side of the table, and you had motions, and you had done your homework and you had done your research—listen, we want to do this work on behalf of the people of Ontario. In fact, they expect it of us. And yet, the government has brought not an individual ministry-by-ministry motion, which is traditional for this committee, so that we can have a debate about the actual financials that are contained within all of these documents—this is not a small amount of work. These briefing books deserve our full attention. It is actually our responsibility to do so, and yet the motion that you brought before us limits our time by specific hours and, really, is only two full days—Tuesday, November 15, and Wednesday, November 16—which brings us right up to the deadline.

1530

So I challenge the government when you say that you think that this process is a better process. This process borders on being undemocratic and is limiting the powers of the opposition members to do our job.

We will not be supporting this motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member opposite for her views. However, I do want to support the House leader, MPP Calandra, on this one.

I'm one of the few people—maybe I'm the only person—in this room who has been on both sides of estimates at any time in this Legislature, because I've had the pleasure of sitting in opposition and government.

I want to thank Minister Calandra for those changes to the standing orders that provide us to—in my opinion, the old way may have made opposition members happy at some time, to be able to do 15 hours on one ministry, but I've seen how irrelevant it became. There were questions and almost filibusters on issues that had nothing to do with the estimates of the ministries. We're actually trying to get so that the members of this committee and the members of the Legislature can get to the real brass tacks, as they say, about the estimates of a particular ministry, so we're putting forth—and I thank the member for Peterborough for the motion—multiple ministries that will allow the members to be far more succinct and direct in the way that they are questioning and relating to the estimates of that particular ministry.

I think this format, because we do have, if I'm correct—correct me if I'm wrong, but we do have a calendar limitation as to when we have to bring these back to the House? Am I correct on that?

Mr. Dave Smith: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So that is of huge importance. I suppose you could talk till the cows come home, as they say, but we're actually trying to put this in a way that the opposition has access to far more ministries and is able to ask the direct questions with regard to the estimates of those ministries than they've ever had before. I'm grateful to the House leader for making that opportunity available, and I say it actually increases the access to accountability and transparency that the opposition is so often requesting. So I think it's a great motion, and we should be supporting it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: In the spirit of co-operation and collegiality—when looking at this, I don't believe that 11 hours acts as a substitute for 15 hours per ministry. It doesn't even offer a pale resemblance of that amount of time spent in investigating and interrogating the estimates. I think it also diminishes the importance of each of those government institutions.

On September 20—I think it's important to have on the Hansard that a letter was sent to all members of this committee, pursuant to standing order 120, to meet as soon as possible. We know that this government took a very long recess, from September 8 until just this past Tuesday, in order to make room for the municipal election.

I think it's rather unfortunate, given this motion, that they're not providing the requisite amount of time—even the 15 hours that we once had. So I will not be in favour of this motion.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: When I was looking at putting this motion together, I actually did a fair bit of research on it, because we need to make sure we're getting this right. I looked at the federal government's situation. Their deficit is greater than our entire budget. When we take a look at what they did in their estimates—I don't think anyone would sit back and say that the government of Canada should sidestep anything or that the government of Canada shouldn't be held accountable or that the expenditures of the government of Canada should be just passed off, especially when their budget deficit was greater than our entire budget will be.

And I don't think there's anyone in Ontario that is going to say health isn't a significant concern across the entire country. When I look at the estimates for the federal government, whose deficit was greater than our entire budget, they spent two hours on health—two hours.

And then I got thinking: We've got a shortage in Ontario of skilled labour and we have been advocating for more skilled labour immigration into Ontario. I know that this has been a major concern for our Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. This is something that we have been advocating for significantly in Ontario, to increase the economic immigration to

Ontario that we need to fill those 380,000 jobs. And the federal government spent one hour on immigration, refugees and citizenship. We've been arguing that we need to increase economic immigration to Ontario.

And, again, no one in this room, no one across Ontario is going to say to you that the federal budget is very small and doesn't deserve a great deal of scrutiny. Yet it's accepted that one hour was all that was needed to go through the estimates for that ministry.

We know that foreign affairs, trade and development are very important to all of Canada, because if we don't have trade with other countries, if we don't have good foreign affairs, if we don't spend the money appropriately in it and at the federal level, then Canada, as a country, is going to experience difficulties for it. So when I was doing the research, what did I find? One hour, without the minister—the minister was not required to come.

So I took all of the stuff, when I looked at what we were doing in Canada, what the federal government was doing, whose deficit is greater than our entire budget—and this is something that was acceptable. This is something that allows them to get to the point, to the estimates, to the spending, to the finance on it, and it can be done at the federal level this way. Perhaps our process was inefficient. Perhaps we weren't doing things the most appropriate way, and perhaps we should look at doing it differently. The status quo just was not good enough. That's why I came up with what I did for this motion.

And then I got thinking about it: We are still experiencing some challenges because of COVID. COVID is still here in our community. In fact, Minister Cho currently has COVID. He tested positive for it this week. What if we were to ask Minister Cho to come but he wasn't able to because he has COVID and he was being responsible and did not want to infect everyone else? How would we deal with that if we did not allow parliamentary assistants to come?

The parliamentary assistant, their job is to be well-versed in everything that the ministry is doing. They are there as the backup. They are there to make sure the accountability from the elected officials is there, and they know exactly what's happening within their ministry. And when you look at it from that perspective, that we want to make sure that the elected officials are being held accountable, but we also recognize that there is a possibility that someone could have COVID, we need to make sure that we have a backup. That is why we have parliamentary assistants in our system, so that we have that accountability. Bringing them to this committee allows for that accountability.

I summarily submit that this motion accomplishes what all of us want, as well as what all of Ontario wants and needs, and that's why I put it forward.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Just a question to clarify: The motion before us is for 11 hours total, but the dates only add up—if my math is correct—to eight and a half hours of time. So I'm just wondering what the implications

are in terms of—basically, if they're in the order they have been listed, we would get one and a half hours for Treasury Board and then zero time for the Premier and Cabinet Office. Is that correct? And if so, if that is the case, could we propose an amendment to the motion to at least allow the 11 hours of time as allocated here? As I mentioned to MPP Fife this morning, Treasury Board is the largest. I might even consider switching Treasury Board to be the three-hour one, if necessary. But I just wanted to get a clarification on that in terms of the total amount time allotted for discussion.

1540

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Does the mover of the motion have an explanation for the discrepancy, if there is one?

Mr. Dave Smith: When I looked at what we had for time, this is what I came up with.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm told that the time that is on the meeting schedule is the time that will be used. We will report whatever work has been completed at that point. I think it was discussed this morning when we picked the selections. All of them were picked but not all of them were going to be completed.

MPP Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just a clarification, because I had the same question. MPP Bowman is quite correct: The time allocated is 11 hours, if you break it down; the time available is 8.5 hours. To the member from Peterborough, when he was carefully crafting and wordsmithing and researching this motion—I wonder, did you give consideration to the fact that you crafted a motion which doesn't allow for the motion to actually be fully carried out? Do you have an answer for that?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Calandra?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sorry, not to—I just had a thought on this. I think that when you're creating motions like this you don't know how long your investigation of any one ministry may go. There may be time left, depending on how long you go. You might be done quicker than two hours on job creation. You might be quicker than three hours on one of them. You do the best you can.

But the reality is, what the opposition is talking about is getting rid of one, two, three, four, five ministries and focusing on one and suggesting that that is more accountable.

In response to what the NDP opposition critic said earlier, the committee is the master of its schedule. The House is no longer the master of the schedule of the committee. A member of the committee brought forward a motion to this table suggesting what time should be created and the committee as a whole will make the determination of whether they approve that or not. It is not the House that is doing that. I think that is far more democratic than the system that we had before. The fact that we're sitting at a table with two independent members who can participate

in the estimates process itself is another democratic improvement that the previous Parliament, in its wisdom, thought would improve the estimates process at committee.

I think the way the motion was crafted actually was—not to speak for the member; he's done it very well himself—very, very thoughtfully done. It recognizes the fact that there is a limited time to investigate estimates, but it also highlights the fact that Parliament itself, in the last Parliament, felt it was inappropriate that Parliament should only get through the estimates of one ministry, for the most part. Here is an opportunity to get through the estimates of one, two, three, four, five, six different—that is a tremendous improvement on the system.

Frankly, the members have obviously rejected the fact that we should focus ourselves on one ministry. That is not the point of estimates. Look, I served federally, and the member is right in how it was dealt with because, federally, it was an investigation on the expenditures. It wasn't a discussion on the policy; policy was left for the House, it was left for the vote that you made in the House. The estimates process was a more surgical approach to how the government is spending money.

Ontario is no longer unique in how it handles estimates, but I think the improvement here is that, just to sum it up, yes, we get through more estimates—not only this committee, but all of the committees will be doing more estimates of more departments and more ministries than I think has been done in this place in the last 40 years, frankly. I think that is a huge improvement in the system. And on every single one of those committees, it is not just recognized parties, but it is also independents who have been invited to attend and participate in the estimates. The motion brought forward on the table actually recognizes that and ensures that independents also have that opportunity.

So I guess from my point, and colleagues will have their own opinions on this, I would certainly reject any thought that we focus on one at the expense of all others—especially the finance committee. If the finance committee isn't going to get through as many of the estimates that it can on its areas of responsibility whilst others have already made their determinations—we saw two reports issued in the House, just before I came down, of other committees that have decided on the estimates and are getting through so many of the ministries. So I think there is a great opportunity here to do it.

Again, just in direct response to Don Valley West—you never can tell. We saw it federally and here—sometimes 15 hours. And Mr. Yakabuski has been here a lot longer than me. You'll know that often you don't get through the entire estimates and you want to move on to something else. I think that's why it was crafted in this way—to ensure that the motion gives the opportunity to review all of the estimates that are available so that no time is wasted in that.

So I commend the member. You did it in a very thoughtful way, and I think it's a testament to the good work that this committee will do.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: For MPP Yakabuski to bemoan the filibuster is somewhat ironic, because you've given some really good barnburner filibusters at committees over the years, and not only were they—and I know I don't flatter often. You exercised your right as a member of provincial Parliament in doing so. You were not limited in that. And in doing so, you often exposed great gaps in the Liberal expenditures—I believe one was actually \$1 billion around a gas plant, as I recall. So I think it's very interesting to see how the tables have turned in some regard.

To the member for Peterborough: I have to say, for you to bring up the federal estimates process—I don't know if you were just free-falling there in that thought process, but to point out that the federal government only spends one hour on reviewing their health estimates—"They can do it, so why can't we do it?"—and then still at the same time say how poorly that process has worked and how it is not serving the people of this province, I think you lost the plot on that point, quite honestly.

To the House leader: Your argument holds no grounds because it is the government itself that is limiting this committee's work. In fact, it was pointed out that there is a calendar limitation. That calendar limitation was set by the government. By releasing and tabling the estimates at the very last hour on the very last day—which, unfortunately, was the day that the monarch passed away.

This committee has certain powers, and I just want to remind the members that members of this committee, once we receive the listed ministries and offices prioritized by the caucus for selection and text of the motion designating the amount of time for each selection—so we've all gone through this process. We've prioritized what ministries we would like to review. And this is the important part, Mr. Chair: Committee meeting times allow committees to meet any day of the week. The motion text calls for each selection to use the maximum time available for consideration.

1550

This committee can meet all day Friday. We are not bound by the weeks of the House. We could meet on the Remembrance Day constituency week if we were serious about reviewing these estimates as thoroughly as we should be. So the calendar limitation and that time pressure are, quite honestly, caused by the government. The ability of this committee to review more than one ministry for more than two hours—it is well within our rights to do so.

The question that people in the public will have once they sift through all of these new rules that are supposed to streamline the process but that really, clearly, are going to limit our abilities to review these expenditures, is: Why doesn't the government want to do their due diligence? Why are you not committed to the openness and transparency which the people of this province certainly deserve?

And so, the motion itself—we're going to move an amendment. We're happy to meet any day, any time, anywhere. And the point around Mr. Cho having COVID: I hope that he recovers quickly, but we have the ability to go online. We learned these lessons through the pandemic.

We can do our work, and the work of Parliament should not be shut down because of illness. We can adapt to this.

A minister should appear before this committee. I want the government to hear that loud and clear. We are not limiting the ministries that we want to see; we're saying that we want to review all of these ministries, including the Treasury Board, especially given the increase in requests for funding, and we would love to see the government be amenable to our amendments.

With that, Mr. Chair, I think my colleague would like to move an amendment to the motion that is currently on the floor.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have another speaker before. Mr. Yakabuski?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member from Waterloo. Notwithstanding her interest in my past times at committee, under the present rules, that would not be allowed, and one of the reasons it happened was because the committee was structured such that it allowed for that free-wheeling at committee. What the minister and House leader has done is tried to tighten that up, so that we're actually doing the work that we're supposed to be doing at estimates committee.

On the schedule, unless I'm reading things wrong, first of all, the House has determined when we have to come back with this report. The committee has its predetermined sitting times, and these times for each one of these ministries are essentially an opportunity and an available time, but it is not an obligation. If you want to have all these ministries, everybody will have to make choices as to how much time of that allotment they're going to use for that ministry. They don't have to use it all. The reality is that we have so much time to get estimates done before we have to report them to the House. That has already been decided.

So I think that we're giving an opportunity—not "think"; we clearly are giving an opportunity to the opposition to review more ministries than ever before. And yes, it does put it into your court to some degree to realize that your background, your research, the homework that you're going to have to do is going to have to be very focused, but that's a good thing. That's accountability. That's making sure that the job at hand is being addressed in the most efficient and effective way. But having estimates go on and on and on so that the previous iteration of John Yakabuski can talk for hours is not the way that it's supposed to work. I'm more than happy to relinquish that opportunity so that the estimates could actually be done in the most efficient way possible.

I do just want to address one thing, because parliamentary assistants have been allowed to speak at committee in the past. Notwithstanding—it wasn't for me to say, but MPP Smith has mentioned it, about Minister Cho: Ministers can be unavailable and incapacitated for something other than COVID which would not allow them to be online. They could be hospitalized. They could be all kinds of things. That's why we have that opportunity and that availability so the parliamentary assistant can sit in their stead. I think that just because—it's not for us to evaluate the reason

why a minister, for health reasons, couldn't be there. So I think we have to move on from that one.

This is a great motion. It will make estimates work far better than it has in the past, and that's actually what the people of Ontario want. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: In the interests of transparency and accountability, such as the member from Peterborough has indicated in his providing compliments towards the federal government, I believe that we also need to reflect that in this Legislature.

So I would like to move an amendment to this motion:

In the first bullet point, strike the numeral "2" and substitute "12";

In the second bullet point, I'd like to strike the numeral "3" and substitute "13 hours";

In bullet point 3, strike the numeral "2" and substitute "12";

In bullet point 4, strike numeral "2" and substitute "12";

In bullet point 5, strike numeral "1," substitute "11" and add "s" to "hours"; and

In the final bullet point, strike the numeral "1," substitute "11" and add "s" to "hours."

Then we can discuss additional meeting times.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's 60 hours in additional time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that. With that, we will recess the committee for five minutes or so in order to make sure that the motion is in order.

The committee recessed from 1557 to 1608.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The committee has before it the amendment, so back to debate. We had the presenter present the amendment. Any further debate on the amendment? MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Just a couple of quick comments from me—and I'll confess that this is my first time heading into the pure joy of committee meetings, so I can hardly wait.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Buckle up.

Mr. Rick Byers: The only thing I'd observe is that, in my previous life, I was involved in a lot of financial activities. Whether it's meetings with management or boards on huge budgets, in a pretty focused period of time, in my experience, we can get to the key points in those. I respect that there's a desire for more and more time.

1610

I've seen the efficiency of questions and the joy of question period every day, but I believe that there's a way this committee can get to the key questions for witnesses within the original time allotted. Just an observation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Recognizing that we're debating the amendment, you're suggesting that you—

Mr. Rick Byers: I would not support the amendment; I'd support the original time allocation.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, thank you. Further debate on the amendment? MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just quickly, clearly the government has low-balled the numbers; we have high-balled the numbers. It's better to have more time than less time to do your work. That's the reason why MPP Kernaghan put forward this motion, the same rationale that, as the motion is currently crafted for 11 hours but allows for only 8.5 hours, that will force us to move quickly through some of those ministries. And it's not inconceivable that that could happen, but the flexibility of having enough time on certain ministries, building that flexibility in, makes a lot of sense to us.

If you believe the Hansard that I quoted by the House leader, the goal was never to limit the time that the committee had to speak to the selected ministries. That's what the House leader said, and yet the motion does the opposite. So we are just trying to course-correct here. We know that this motion is not going to pass, but we have to try because that is our responsibility.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further discussion?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Chair, how can I not comment on that? I mean, the NDP is basically suggesting that they brought forward a motion that they knew would not pass. That speaks to the whole purpose of why we would not want to entertain a motion. So I would just ask that the member would simply withdraw the motion and let us get to the real business at hand, which is the estimates across many different ministries.

I love that the member opposite is giving time to the words that I said in the House when I was in support of this new process for doing estimates, because we gave it a lot of consideration when we brought it forward. We thought to ourselves, there's a committee of this Legislature—what used to be called the estimates committee; colleagues will remember that. It would meet a couple of times a year and go through 15, 16 hours, and, for the new members, a minister would sit here for 15, 16 hours. The first hour or two, maybe, was quality work that drilled down on what the point of estimates is: to review the proposed expenditures of the government. Then hour four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 got into exactly what the member opposite doesn't want—filibustering—both from the committee members and from the other members.

I can sit here, Mr. Chair, until 6 o'clock, 12 o'clock tonight, and I can talk this sucker out. Believe me, I could do it. The member knows. And there could be no estimates whatsoever. What purpose does that serve?

I think the member, Mr. Byers, was quite correct. And the member opposite said they have briefings that they've got to get through, estimates which have also been tabled in the House. Well, surely to goodness, the members opposite are starting to do that work already. Surely they have focused on what it is that they want to think about. The estimates process, again, is not supposed to be a process that looks at government policy and re-litigates something that has been passed in the House. That is not the point of the estimates process. I can't imagine any organization that would allow something like that to happen.

When we talk about the federal, the estimates, I think, for health, national defence, Canadian heritage, foreign affairs, immigration, as the member opposite said, were an hour. Of course, those motions were moved by the NDP in Ottawa, because, of course, there is a coalition in Ottawa of the NDP and the Liberals, which hold the balance of power and which bring forward the estimates for the federal.

We don't have to compare ourselves to them, Mr. Speaker. I think the process there, as in any other Legislature, is about estimates. It is about drilling down and finding something there and asking the ministers, asking officials, asking a parliamentary assistant, if they are there, about an expenditure and how that compares to the policy that was passed by the Legislative Assembly. Whether you're in a majority or minority, it doesn't really matter, the Legislative Assembly has passed it. A government minister is tasked with implementing the policy as agreed upon by the Legislative Assembly, and the estimates process is there to ensure that there is accountability.

What the opposition is suggesting that we do, ultimately, is that we—well, first they're not suggesting anything, because the member opposite just said it's a motion that they're trying to make a point with. I would suggest to you, Mr. Chair, you don't make a point with estimates on a motion; you make a point on what you have read and what you have digested, and you bring that forward when the minister is in front of you. Again, if the finance committee itself can't do that, if the members of the opposition on the finance committee themselves can't do that, then it is strange to me, because especially this committee should be able to do that. Especially this committee should be able to reflect on the fact that the opportunity to get through more of the estimates, to drill down on more of the ministries, would be a benefit to them and to the work that they will be doing over the next four years in this House.

The whole point of this is to allow members to specialize in certain areas of importance. That's why, presumably, the NDP critic for finance serves on the finance committee and, I would submit, probably why the independent Liberal wanted to serve on the finance committee: because of the background that she brings to the table. That is, I know, why a lot of the members are here.

Look, I don't think it bears any more discussion. They've brought forward an amendment that they never had any intention of passing. They wanted to make a point in support of an old process. I guess we shouldn't be surprised by that, Mr. Chair, because we've seen this a lot. The NDP will always seem to stand up for processes that don't work, as opposed to moving things forward. We talked about the ability to have members and ministers and witnesses brought on camera through Zoom. Well, that didn't exist until the last Parliament, until the government ensured that that could happen.

Again, I go back to what the member has brought forward here. The member could have brought forward a motion that would just deal with one area. Sure, we could spend eight hours dealing with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Who wouldn't want

to speak about the good things that minister has done, the \$16 billion worth of economic activity that we brought, the new manufacturing that has come to the province of Ontario, the thousands of jobs?

The member for Windsor–Tecumseh is here, the first time in, what, over 75 years that we have a member—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: How long?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Ninety-three.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —93 years that we have a member from Windsor, partially, I would submit to you, because of the good work of this government to ensure that we brought back the auto sector and that we brought back the next generation of auto manufacturing to the province of Ontario. Who wouldn't want to spend eight hours talking about all of the good work that has been done in that? It would be a disservice, though, I would submit to you: It would be a disservice to this committee, it would be a disservice to the Legislative Assembly, because there are other important things that we have to talk about, not the least of which is, as the member from Peterborough talked about, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. We have a labour shortage in so many different areas. Because of the extraordinary work that we're doing to bring jobs back to the province of Ontario, we have a labour shortage. And we have brought programs forward to deal with that, to help with retraining, to help on the immigration side. The estimates should reflect that.

I would submit to you that that is what members are going to want to look at. What are the priorities that you've set? What is the budget that you have set? What are the accomplishments that you have done, and is there enough money in the estimates that the government has submitted to support the policies that Parliament, this Legislative Assembly, voted on?

I know I will vote against the amendment because it wasn't brought forward in the spirit of anything other than to be disruptive on committee, to avoid getting to the real work, which is the estimates. That's what we're here fighting for—to get to the estimates. I can understand that the opposition doesn't want to do that. I appreciate that, because we're seeing an economy that is moving in the right direction. We're seeing jobs come back. We're seeing, as you said, manufacturing come back. We're seeing skilled trades come back to the province of Ontario.

1620

The estimates will show, I would submit to you—and you have briefing packages there—that we actually are fulfilling the commitments that we have made, with significant resources behind them, but if we're not, there is the opportunity, by being able to review each and every one of them, as the member from Peterborough has highlighted.

I think that is what the intent—when the last Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of the changes to the process to allow committees to specialize, and when we fought to ensure in this Parliament that independent members also had a voice on the committees, that they were able to participate.

It's no secret that we won an overwhelming majority. Does that mean, though, that the government should run roughshod over democratic review? Absolutely not.

Had we listened to the NDP, there would be one member of the NDP here and there would be no independents, but we wanted to make sure that didn't happen. That's why we increased representation.

In summation—I'm prepared to speak more on it, but I think the member for Kitchener might want to have a comment or two.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Waterloo.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Waterloo. Excuse me.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Fife.

Hon. Paul Calandra: MPP Fife might want to have a comment or two. Because you're right; Kitchener and Waterloo are booming because of the hard work—anyway, I digress.

In a nutshell, that's why I don't want to speak for the other members—because the committees are the masters of their own work schedule, and each of the members has an independent voice. But that's why I will certainly be voting against this—because I want to get to the estimates. I want to make sure the government is on the track. I want to ensure the accountability through the estimates process. I certainly don't want to be sidetracked by a motion that was brought forward in bad faith.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: First, I just want to comment on MPP Byers. It's true; a corporation—when you sit down, you have to be very focused. The estimates process—we are reviewing the proposed estimates and expenditures for each government department, agency, board, commission, so it does require more time. It's for all of the expenditures for the entire province, so it does warrant more than two hours on one—for the Ministry of Finance.

It's interesting that the House leader has said that he's happy that I pointed out how inconsistent he has been. On March 3, he said, in Hansard, "What we've said is that there shouldn't actually be a time limit for the investigating of estimates." And yet, he's very supportive of the original motion that came forward that limits the discussion and the exploration of the estimates, so much so that the motion calls for 11 hours but only allows for eight and a half hours. Those are two major inconsistencies.

We wanted to bring forward a motion which allowed for more time, which would explore the possibility of some flexibility on the part of the government. It was never brought forward in bad faith.

The fact of the matter is that you have a majority in this government and you vote as a block. You don't give your members the independence to exercise their independent right to vote on particular motions.

So we know that we're trying to make the case that estimates warrants more time and more attention. We think it is our responsibility to do so.

We could spend more than one or two hours on Treasury Board alone. The Bulk Media Buy Program, for instance—\$51 million, when the actuals for 2020-21 were zero. I have two hours' worth of questions, like where's

the RFP for this bulk media process? Who is vetting the advertising on behalf of the government? Is this those very annoying commercials that say that every classroom is doing great in the province of Ontario or that there's no crisis in health care? These are good questions that we have to ask.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, it deserves an answer, and with respect, Mr. Calandra, you don't give answers in 30 seconds either.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Order. One at a time.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And then I have to say, the other part of Treasury Board, the \$6.475 billion—it will take some time for the minister, Minister Sarkaria—I'm sure he would love to come to this committee and extol the virtues of some of these investments. I want to hear that. I want him to have the time to make that case.

I know that you're going to vote against this motion, but as I said, our responsibility as opposition members is to ensure that we have done our due diligence. What we just hope for, Mr. Chair, is that the government would do theirs.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further discussion? There's no further discussion. Shall I call the question on the amendment? All those in favour of the amendment raise their hands. Opposed? The amendment is lost.

Back to the original motion: Any further debate on the original motion? MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I do want to acknowledge, again, the opportunity to be at this committee. I do appreciate that, as I said in the first committee, so thank you to the House leader for that.

I do also want to acknowledge MPP Byers's comments. I agree, and I do like the idea of efficiency and effectiveness. That's just part of my DNA, so I do value that. I would not have looked forward to sitting through filibusters from anyone: government, opposition or independents. I think that is a good use of people's time, so I do appreciate that.

I wondered if the MPP from Peterborough would be open to a friendly amendment which would give us a little bit more time. I'm asking partially, I guess, for two reasons. One is there are a few new members and new MPPs to this committee who have a steep learning curve. The size of these budgets is very big and there is a lot in them. There is a lot of meat in there, and it is good for all of us on both sides of the House to understand.

I wondered if the MPP from Peterborough would be open to a friendly amendment which would add one hour to the first four departments listed, so one hour to the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; one hour to the Ministry of Finance; one hour to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development; and then 1.25 hours to the Treasury Board Secretariat, leaving the Office of the Premier and the Cabinet Office at one hour, and simply adding one new day on November 14, from 9 to 10:15 and from 3 to 6. It's basically just adding,

from the original 8.5 hours, 4.25 hours, for a total of 12.75 for us to get through all six of the requests.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I don't believe that would be a friendly amendment. It may be friendly but it's not an appropriate amendment. If the member wishes to make an amendment, it would require making an amendment to the motion. We are speaking to the motion, not to an amendment.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay, thank you for the clarification. I guess I am proposing an amendment where we would:

—under “Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for two hours” strike “two” and add “three”;

—under “the Ministry of Finance” strike “three” and add “four”;

—under “the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development” strike “two” and replace it with “three”;

—under “Treasury Board Secretariat” replace “two” with “3.25”; and

—down below, under the paragraph the starts “That the committee meet” that we would add “on Monday, November 14, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.”

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, we have put the amendment. We will have to recess for a few minutes so the amendment can be printed so all the members of the committee can see the amendment prior to further debate on it.

The committee recessed from 1629 to 1637.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. I believe we all have a copy of the proposed amendment. We'll ask MPP Bowman if she would read the actual amendment into the record.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That the motion be amended as follows:

That “2” be struck from the first bullet of the first paragraph and replaced with “3”;

That “3” be struck from the second bullet of the first paragraph and replaced with “4”;

That “2” be struck from the third bullet of the first paragraph and replaced with “3”;

That “2” be struck from the fourth bullet of the first paragraph and replaced with “3.25”; and

That “On Monday, November 14 from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and” be added above the first bullet of the sixth paragraph.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You're heard the motion. Further debate? Any further debate on this amendment? If not, shall I put the question? All those in favour,

raise your hand. All those opposed, raise your hand. The motion is lost.

Back to the original motion: further debate on the original motion? No further debate on the original motion. Shall I put the question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): A recorded vote has been requested.

Ayes

Anand, Byers, Calandra, Crawford, Cuzzetto, Dowie, Dave Smith.

Nays

Bowman, Fife, Kernaghan.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The motion is carried.

Are there any other motions or further business for the committee? If not, I would just ask: I think the committee has agreed to meet with the Financial Accountability Officer. I just wanted to make sure that we had a motion on record. We wanted assurances from the committee that the committee agrees to invite him for a visit, to talk about what he does and how we can work together for the people of Ontario. Any discussion on that?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just some context—this is the first I'm hearing of this. Is it in the regular cycle of the finance committee to meet with the FAO?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Is it which?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Is it the regular practice of the finance committee to meet with the FAO?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): It doesn't necessarily. It was on the invitation of the finance committee if they wanted to meet with the—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, he reached out to us?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm not sure it's fair to say who reached out to who. We had a discussion, and the Financial Accountability Officer and myself agreed that it would be a great idea for him to come and explain what he does, and whether the committee agrees with what he does.

With that, everybody is agreed? We want to make sure that the committee accepts that that's what we wanted to do. Okay, everybody? If there's nobody objecting, we will arrange that in the coming weeks.

With that, there being nothing else, this committee stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1642.

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