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Thursday 17 November 2005

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Jeudi 17 novembre 2005

**Standing committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Use of technology

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Utilisation de la technologie

Chair: Bob Delaney
Clerk: Douglas Arnott

Président : Bob Delaney
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 17 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Jeudi 17 novembre 2005

The committee met at 1542 in committee room 1.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Bob Delaney): Good afternoon, everybody. This is the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. We are convened at the request of the Speaker, whose memo to me, as the Chair, requesting a review of technology has prompted this meeting. Pursuant to that, we have a subcommittee report to read into the record.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Your subcommittee on committee business met on Monday, October 17, 2005, and Tuesday, November 8, 2005, to consider the committee's schedule of business, and recommends the following:

(1) That the committee meet on Thursday, November 17, 2005, to commence its review of the use of technology in the chamber, pursuant to the referral from the Speaker dated Thursday, October 27, 2005.

(2) That the procedural clerk (research) be directed to provide background information on the use of technology at the Ontario Legislative Assembly and in other jurisdictions.

(3) That the committee meet with the Ombudsman of Ontario on Thursday, November 24, 2005, pursuant to the committee's permanent order of reference, SO 106(f).

The Chair: Motion to adopt? Mr. Hardeman. All in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Discussion?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'll be going back to the subcommittee report that was adopted. It's not that I want the report changed, but it seems to me that some of the things we talked about at the subcommittee meeting included technology beyond the chamber. The first recommendation, as the Speaker's letter states, was to look at technology in the chamber. If we're going to proceed further with the information that has been given us, I think we would need to look at more than just technology in the chamber.

The Chair: Is that a motion to broaden the scope of—

Mr. Hardeman: The speed and efficiency of our committee, having approved that prior to any discussion on amendments to it, I would put forward in my motion to approve the report that instead of just in the chamber, we look at the precinct or technology in the building, because some of the things we would be discussing

would be communications within the lounges and other areas in the building.

The Chair: OK. Mr. Hardeman has moved that the scope of the committee's activities be expanded beyond the chamber and include technology in the precinct.

Interjection.

The Chair: Gilles, all you missed was the reading of the subcommittee report.

Discussion? All in favour? Opposed?

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Are we going to get a chance to get on the record on stuff here?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bisson: OK. Fine. I'll let you guys go, and then—

The Chair: Just to recap for Mr. Bisson and Mrs. Sandals, we have approved the subcommittee report. Mr. Hardeman has moved expanding the scope of the discussion beyond the legislative chamber to include technology in the legislative precinct. The motion is carried.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Chair: We're now open for discussion.

Mr. Bisson: I wonder if somebody could turn on some lights here. The lights are off. It's kind of dark on this end.

The Chair: It may be low-grade technology in the precinct.

Mr. Bisson: There we go. If we're going to talk about technology, the least we can do is—

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: I thought maybe they were not turned on or something.

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: I'm beginning to think you're trying to keep the lights off the opposition.

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: Just so I can read my documents here. Thank you very much.

To be clear, I want to run a couple of things by members to see what kind of reaction we get in regard to the use of technology, not only in the chamber but within the precinct itself. Some of you would know—maybe some of you don't know—that in the House of Commons, outside of question period, when they're basically doing debates, members are allowed to bring their laptops into the Legislature so they can deal with things. While they're sitting there listening to debates, they have

documents that they need in preparation for debate. Everything is there.

On that issue, I'd just like to hear comments from some of the members: how they feel about that and if that's something that would meet with the approval of other members. That would be my first thing, if I could just raise that and see if I can get some kind of reaction. How do you guys feel about that?

The Chair: Shall we go around the table and solicit some opinions?

Mr. Bisson: Yes.

The Chair: OK.

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I'm sorry; I missed what you said. At what point in time would they allow them to bring—at what stage?

Mr. Bisson: I'll just repeat: In the House of Commons, outside of question period—in other words, when you're in debate, when members are sitting there listening to other people's debates—MPs are allowed to bring their laptops into the assembly. Basically, they're able to do what they've got to do. When they're debating, they've got to close the laptop. You can't use it to read your speech or read verbatim—nothing like that. It's got to be closed. The point is, as you're sitting there, rather than using a pen and paper and writing a letter to somebody, you can be on your word processor drafting a letter or doing whatever you would normally do when you're working in your office.

Members would also know that a long time ago, members didn't even have offices here. Your office was the desk in the Legislature, and the only tool you had was a pen and a piece of paper. This is kind of the same thing. I'm just wondering where members are with that, if they're supportive of such an idea—something that I, quite frankly, support. I'd like to see what people have to say.

Mr. Hardeman: On a point of order: Just to make sure, did we vote on the subcommittee report and have we totally dealt with it now, and this is the start of the debate of our function here?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Hardeman: I don't have a point of order then, Chair.

I guess I'm a little concerned about that topic. I'm a little concerned, because as I was reading some of the information in our agenda, one line came out to me: What we do here to improve the efficiency of the place is supposed to be based on improving democracy and improving the ability of the people to relate to and be involved in the process. I don't think that includes making sure that the members' time is more valuably spent so that instead of going back to the office to do work, they can sit there, pretend to be listening and do their own work. I don't think that's a matter of efficiency. If you're in the House, you're supposed to be there listening to what's going on, not doing other things. Only my wife is good at multi-tasking; I'm not.

I don't think we should create an atmosphere where there are 12 people in the House and the cameras are

there, and 11 people are doing work on their computers and one person is standing there talking about something that no one who's watching the TV has any interest in because they're reading petitions.

1550

Mr. Bisson: Have you paid attention to the debates lately? People are reading papers or reading books. They're doing all kinds of things. It really changes nothing.

Mr. Hardeman: I don't have any problem with banning newspapers. I have a problem with creating the environment that there is no relevance to being in the Legislature, that that's not an important part of our job, not important enough to have your mind on it. I don't think we should be creating that atmosphere within our Legislature.

Mr. Bisson: Luddite. Back at the turn of the century when people threw their sabots into the machines because they wanted to stop technology, they said, "You are sabotaging."

The Chair: Let's come back to the agenda. One of the questions asked of us by the Speaker was to come to a decision, as a committee, so that the practice in the House doesn't evolve from ad hoc decisions by the Speaker. We have the ability now, as members, to formulate a policy to affect activities in the House by members.

Just so that we're all proceeding from the same base of information, Peter Sibenik is here. He did just an excellent review of the use of technology in other Legislatures across Canada, as well as several in the United States. I'm not going to presume that everybody read it to the same depth I did and has the same background in IT that I do. So perhaps before we proceed with this discussion, it would be appropriate for Peter to review the report he put together and set out some of the parameters for the decision the Speaker has asked us to make.

Mr. Peter Sibenik: I believe the document that the Chair was referring to was the fourth document, entitled Survey on the Use of Technology in Legislative Chambers in Other Parliamentary Jurisdictions. There are 12 jurisdictions in all that responded to a survey that we conducted about the use of technology in legislative chambers. Most of these jurisdictions do allow some kind of portable technology, if only it's things like Black-Berries. None would allow cell phones. Some allow notebook computers. Seven of those 12 jurisdictions do allow it.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): Which were the jurisdictions?

Mr. Sibenik: It wouldn't be the Senate of Canada. Newfoundland and Labrador would be one. Nova Scotia would be another. Prince Edward Island—

Mr. Miller: All Canadian?

Mr. Sibenik: These are the Canadian ones that I'm going through.

I'm looking at the Australian jurisdictions. New South Wales allows it. The Australian capital/territory does not. The House of Commons at Westminster does not as well,

although there is some reconsideration given to laptops, especially in the committee context there.

Mr. Bisson: We already do that in committee.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes. In the case of notebooks, there are certain restrictions. The restrictions aren't the same across all the jurisdictions. Some will say, "Well, not in question period," or "You've got to wait until orders of the day before you can use them," or the person who's got the floor of the House cannot use the laptop computer at that point in time.

Some allow Internet access, and there are differences in different jurisdictions as to whether there is a wireless connection or whether it's hard-wired into the members' desks. As for the cost, generally it varies. The infrastructure would be provided by the central institution. Sometimes it's the assembly itself or the Parliament. Other times it's a government department. In the case of the actual portable technologies, the members either have to use their so-called allowance or else it's provided centrally by the assembly or the Parliament or a combination of the two.

That's basically a summary of the survey, and the details of course are in the summary.

Mr. Bisson: Just a quick question, Chair: In regard to those jurisdictions that use laptops or notebooks in the assembly itself, are there any comments you have in regard to negative effects that that may have had with the experience?

Mr. Sibenik: The respondents didn't really canvass that particular issue, but the reason for the restrictions was probably as a pre-emptive strike, in the sense that sometimes laptops, like other portable technologies, might cause some difficulties: that they'd be too obtrusive, they might be noisy, whatever the case, or they might interfere with the flow of debate or question and answer, hence those kinds of restrictions. In a sense, indirectly there was that kind of response but not directly so.

The Chair: Mr. Sergio had a comment, then Mr. Miller.

Mr. Sergio: If I had my choice, I wouldn't use anything in the House whatsoever, a BlackBerry or any other device. I think it takes away from the workings of the House, reserved as a special time when we sit in that particular chair.

I haven't gone through all the material with respect to using anything else at any time other than in question period. But I'll tell you, even if somebody is speaking on the other side, and next to me or behind, there's a BlackBerry rumbling on the desk, it bothers me. I can see the gendarmes down there, and the kids and everybody else looking at it, and they're wondering and stuff. So it's bothersome.

If I had my choice, I wouldn't do it. I think the workings of the House should be restricted to working in the House. It takes away from the aura that is reserved for members to address the people of Ontario when we're sitting.

How bad it is to allow it maybe outside of question period, I really don't know, but I would still have some

reservations in using anything at all, BlackBerries or laptops, connected or unconnected. I don't know; I'm sensitive to the workings of the House and I would like to see that reserved to the workings of the House.

The thing is, we can leave at any time. We can go outside to make a phone call. We can always pop in and out. I don't see why we have to infringe on the time we spend in the House. I don't know how the public would feel about it. How was it before we used TVs in the House? We were managing, right? Not so theatrical maybe, but I think the workings of the House were going on and maybe in a better fashion.

Mr. Bisson: There were far better speeches before television.

Mr. Sergio: There you go. It has some kind of influence.

The last thing: I wouldn't want to see a colleague calling somebody on his BlackBerry, "Oh, we need an answer; please get back to me as quickly as possible," or whatever. That's my comment. I'd be willing to hear what other members have to say.

The Chair: I'll hear comments from Mr. Miller and then Mr. Marchese. I've used some of the notes that Peter has given us. I'd like to try and sum up, and perhaps we can come to some consensus on the use of laptops or tablets in the chamber. I might add, as I'm doing this, that I'm doing it on my tablet in front of me.

Mr. Miller: My feeling is that we should recognize the practice, the fact that probably 90% of the people are using BlackBerries in the legislative chamber, so I think we should recognize the trend and have rules that permit it, seeing it is what is currently occurring. My feeling in terms of actual laptop computers is that I wouldn't want to see them in the chamber. Maybe in time, as things evolve, that's the way it would go, but at this time my feeling would be that they shouldn't be in the chamber itself.

1600

Yesterday when we were speaking, you had some proposals—I assume you're going to bring those up at some point in the committee—in terms of wireless access in the rooms beside the chamber, and I would certainly be in favour of that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I don't know what I missed, but I'm more or less supporting what I've heard.

I find the reading of newspapers in the chamber a bit offensive, actually. I suspect that anyone from the public who comes in and sees that would find it equally offensive. We should actually ban the reading of newspapers in the Legislative Assembly. If people want to read clippings, that's perfectly acceptable and respectful in terms of not disrespecting the people on the other side or the audience that might be coming to view the proceedings.

Personally, I would ask that we ban the use of newspapers in the chamber, but I find that the BlackBerry is the least intrusive. It's a little gadget, and as long as people are not just putting it in front of them as they would a newspaper, I think it's practical. It doesn't offend as much, it's more or less invisible or can be made

invisible, it doesn't show disrespect, except if you're doing it disrespectfully, and so that for me is acceptable. But there's just no way that I think computers are appropriate in the chamber.

The other discussion that I'm assuming you've proposed—how do we make computers accessible in other areas of this place?—I think is very useful. I'm sure that Gilles would like to speak to that. I can support that very easily, obviously.

The Chair: OK. I'm going to get some comments from Caroline, Tim, back to Ernie, and then Gilles one more time. We'll try to focus this and make a decision on technology in the chamber, if that's OK—and then Liz.

Ms. Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I feel like it's déjà vu. I used to sit on the Legislative Assembly committee when I was in opposition, and one of the first discussions we had, I think in 2000, had to do with different types of technology in the Legislature.

The Legislature is a debating chamber. It's a place where members traditionally are to debate issues, to listen to one another. More and more, we intrude on that. We intrude on it in different ways: the newspapers, the fact that people really don't listen to one another when they're in there, all kinds of side conversations that go on, and so on and so forth. Irrespective of that, I guess the question is—I'm one of the people who don't, but I would say that probably 80%, 90% of the members, from my observation, use BlackBerries, because they're non-intrusive ways of getting information.

I was in Wales. I think Doug and Peter were there as well. When we went to look at their Legislature, each desk had these computer screens. People would get e-mail there. I found it quite offensive, to tell you the truth. I didn't see how that helps to do the job. Having access to computers, maybe, where we go out to the members' lounges or whatever, to be able to access quickly our staff or things like that—certainly the ministers have all kinds of staff sitting there. I don't see how having another piece of something on our desks is going to make the debating chamber a better place to work in.

I'm one of those people for whom the less intrusive we can keep the work we do in the chamber, the better it is. I think there are a lot of things we can do in bringing the chamber into the 21st century, but it's not more about technology than it is about maybe changing the environment, how we behave in the chamber.

My preference would be maybe keeping up to date now and saying, "Everyone's using these BlackBerries anyway. They're non-intrusive." Keeping in step with what's already happening is one thing, but I don't think that to add more technology on people's desks in the chamber is conducive to making it a better place to work as a legislator.

Access outside of the Legislature—I certainly didn't like what I saw in Wales. I didn't see any evidence that it made it easier for people to actually get the job done. Some training I've had with other Legislatures, in Wisconsin, as a matter of fact, suggests that the multitasking is not such a good thing because you're not present; you're not there to listen to what people are saying.

That's when mistakes are made because you've got too much stuff going on at the same time, and we mentally can't do that.

That's my opinion when it comes to bringing technology into the chamber. I would prefer less intrusion, not more intrusion, into the Legislature, and to keep it in the tradition that a Legislature is a debating chamber, to debate and discuss issues back and forth. To me, if we put too much of the technology in there we're going to be distracted worse than we are now, and I just don't think that is going to make it a better place.

Mr. Marchese: So we all agree.

The Chair: Let's finish with the people who would like to throw in their two cents' worth. If you can scope it a little bit, so much the better.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): This is technology. This is a computer. The thing we're talking about is not technology; we're only talking about the size of the technology. You're saying that small technology is acceptable and larger technology isn't. I obviously disagree, because laptops have gotten so small and thin, and maybe if we want to look at it that way, we should look at the size of the laptop. The structure of the House is unfortunately not random and open debate; it's all structured and precast. I don't know how bringing a laptop in would hurt debate any more than these do, because I don't think these do.

I like Rosario's idea that we ban newspapers, because I think it looks offensive for somebody to be sitting there with a great big piece of something, but these laptops are now down to, what, two pounds and an inch thick, and one and half times the size of an 8½-inch piece of paper.

I find my most difficult task as an MPP is keeping on top of all the correspondence and detail I get. I need more productive time. I can use electronic devices in the House. I need it because of the quantum of it. Everybody can get to us by e-mail. I like that extra productive time in the House. I do it with a BlackBerry. I would totally support laptops of small dimensions, not ones that fold up where you have the computer screen folded up, but ones that lie flat on your desk that you could do interactive e-mail with.

I also support complete Wi-Fi, that we wire this building so that we can have access from any part of the building with computers. I would even go one step farther and suggest that members—I'm parliamentary assistant to Jim Bradley and my office is over at the corner of Wellesley and Bay. It's a real pain in the butt for me to have to go over there to get to my computer. We should look at having computer cubicles or desks where we could, as members—some guys have offices in here, but there should be banks, in my opinion, where we can access a desk with a bit of privacy and make it much more efficient to be operating out of this House rather than being all over the place.

I'm probably the only dissenting voice here.

1610

The Chair: Mr. Hardeman, you have another chance.

Mr. Hardeman: I would agree with Rosario on the banning of newspapers, except that I'm not sure it falls

within the scope of what we're discussing. That has always been there. We're now looking at technology in the precinct. I'm not sure that includes newspapers, although I totally agree that any of us—I would think we have enough sense that we would come in, and every one of us gets the clippings in the morning, and read the clippings instead of the newspaper, because I don't think there's anything more distracting than the person next to you rolling out the Aylmer Express, the largest newspaper in Ontario, and holding it out in front of both people on either side, because it goes almost that far. Seeing that the story doesn't warrant that much intrusion on other people, we should all do a better job of confining it.

I mentioned this earlier, and I have found it here now in the notes that were given to us. There is a paragraph here, and this must be the committee Ms. Di Cocco was a member of: "The committee is of the view that technology should not be an end unto itself, but rather should, as the committee's mandate from the House indicates, 'improve democracy and enhance accountability.'" Everything we're talking about is trying to improve the productivity of the individuals as opposed to democracy for the people.

As to bringing a computer in so that I can do my office work in the House because I was forced to have a duty day, there is nothing that's going to help my citizens connect to me better. If we're going to do it to enhance democracy and use the argument that that's what the laptops will do, then we have to connect them to the Net so that my constituents can actually get to me, and just before the vote can send me a message and tell me how to vote.

That would improve democracy, but I don't think that's what we're talking about doing. We all agree that as members of the Legislature, we were sent here to do the people's business, to go back home and hear what they have to say, and to do it through correspondence. But when you get in there, you're on your own. It's your turn to express what you think is the view of your constituents, and in turn, to vote the way you think your constituents want you to, to represent them.

I think we're putting too much focus on the fact that we are there just disseminating information. The buck stops there. That's the talk. I don't know why as a non-member of the cabinet I would ever get into the Legislature and need more information than I have available; you shouldn't. You should be prepared to come there and express what it is you're debating and express your view. People being able to get hold of you or your staff being able to tell you, "Oh, don't say that," or "Don't do that," doesn't bode well. That isn't the person or the body that's supposed to be telling us what to do. It's supposed to be your decision. Communication with others should be cut off when you get in there. You now represent the people you represent in the best way you know how. I don't think that's a time to disseminate information. I'm opposed to any type of link to the technology Web.

Mr. Marchese: Including the BlackBerry?

Mr. Hardeman: No, I'm going to stop there. The reason I say not including the BlackBerry is because I'm not sure where you draw the line. I think I can draw it between a laptop and a BlackBerry, but if you say, "Well, they're both technology, they're both the same," so is my watch; it's technology too. Can I not wear it? What about the cell phone? Can you wear it, or do we have to get rid of it on the way in? You have to draw the line somewhere on what is practical now, what is being used now.

Incidentally—I speak with some authority—I don't have a computer in my office, laptop or otherwise. I don't use any computer myself except my BlackBerry, and it's the only one I know how to use. I don't think it's necessary for me or for people—my staff are close enough to me in the office that they can deliver the paper to me and run the computer for me. I don't use it at all. Incidentally, I get most of my work done for my constituents. I think the—

The Chair: Thank you. Just so that nobody can accuse you of being a Luddite, I note that you are not using a fountain pen, but a ballpoint. Mr. Bisson and Ms. Sandals—Mr. Fonseca, you haven't thrown anything in. Do you want to have a word on this? Then I'd like to do a little wrap-up and see if we can focus some of the discussion to a decision. So I'm going to do Gilles, Liz and then you. Will that be OK? OK.

Mr. Bisson: I know when I'm on the losing side of an argument. Along with Mr. Peterson, I can feel the train coming. But I want to say a couple of things because I think we're mixing things up.

First of all, the argument that somehow or other this reference was about enhancing democracy and somehow corresponding through a laptop by way of writing a letter in word processors doesn't help democracy, listen, when people first started coming to this place, all they had were pen and paper. They were using the technology of their day to communicate with their constituents.

When people came into this Legislature, and part of their job was to communicate with their constituents, they would walk in with their mail, as I did when I first got elected in 1990. There were no laptops. Back then, you could carry laptops on your back in the packsack, it was that big. You used to walk into the Legislature with your signing binders and you would read your mail. You would write the response, you would sign it, somebody would put it in an envelope and it would go. I was communicating with my constituents back then. The difference today is, I don't do that any more. All of my correspondence—as I would argue, most members'—is done by way of computer. We use word processors to be able to communicate with our constituents.

To Mr. Peterson's point: I don't write handwritten letters any more. I stopped doing that a long time ago. I use some software called Maximizer—actually, I'm on Maximizer 9 now—which is contact management software that has every case file I've ever dealt with in my constituency since 1990. If you called about the cat on the back fence, I have a file on it, and I use that in order to communicate with my constituents. How you work

might be different, but you have to have some respect for how some of us work. I'm a totally paperless office. We use computers for absolutely everything. There is not a piece of paper. Everything is scanned. We have fax to e-mail. Everything is electronic. I just make the argument, don't argue with me that somehow or other using a laptop in the chamber is not going to add to democracy, because that's the only way I communicate. Anyway, I know when I'm losing the argument.

However, I do want to say a couple of things very quickly. One thing that I think we need to do for sure is this whole Wi-Fi issue. It is unfair to a person like Mr. Peterson, or anybody else who is a parliamentary assistant—I know, I lived it—or a cabinet minister, when you don't have an office in this building. Most people have laptops. At least if they have a laptop they can plug into a network somewhere; they're able to deal with their e-mail in the lobby and do whatever it is they've got to do. If you're a PA or a minister and you walk into this place, you have nowhere, unless you run into somebody's office and physically plug in. So I would support that we need Wi-Fi technology across this building—that goes without saying—including the lobbies.

The second thing is, as far as technology in the chamber itself, one of the things we may want to look at—and it would be interesting to hear back from Peter on this—is that if people are uncomfortable with my communicating with my constituent by way of my laptop, is there technology that allows us to get Hansard, order papers and all of that stuff electronically? Where we're at now is that any time you want something, if it's not in the Hansard—if I'm looking for something that was said in a speech five weeks ago, I don't know what I did five weeks ago. I have to go to legislative research or I've got to go to the computer to do a search. If we had technology that at the very least allows us to access Hansard, order papers and legislation so that we can do our jobs in the Legislature by way of, "I want to look up Bill 163," and you can punch it up and it comes up—I don't know if such technology exists—that would be useful for the purpose of doing our jobs in the Legislature.

Wi-fi technology: You Luddites one day will come into the 21st and 22nd centuries. I'll have some other points after.

The Chair: Don't be so pessimistic on Wi-Fi. Ms Sandals.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I agree that if it's possible, we should do the Wi-Fi because it would be very helpful to have some access here, as opposed to having to run back down the street.

I wonder if in fact we should say that it's OK to use these, and in saying that it's actually OK to use these and admitting what almost all of us do anyway, we might arrange to get the desks outfitted with some sort of a foam pad to set them on, and then, as they all vibrate, they might be less disruptive.

1620

Mr. Bisson: That's if you don't have a belt.

Mrs. Sandals: Exactly. It depends on what I'm wearing, whether or not I want it sitting on my belt. Some days I do; some days I don't. It depends on the wardrobe.

Mr. Bisson: I apologize. I really do apologize. That was a very sexist thing for me to say. Thank you.

Interjection.

Mrs. Sandals: Well, then, we have to fight that out with Peter, but that's another issue.

Interjections.

Mrs. Sandals: At any rate, it might be useful to have some sort of foam pads available that you could sit them on so that they don't make such a racket when they start vibrating.

In terms of the laptop issue, I actually agree. I don't think we're at the point where we want to use them. I think part of the reason is the appearance that it gives to the public. The reason is that if I look at the Hansard laptop, if that was on TV, it's very obvious that you're sitting, doing something as opposed to what Bob's doing, which isn't very obvious. At this point, when not everybody is on to that technology, I think it's probably premature to go there. I suspect that sooner or later we will get around to a laptop. I don't think we're ready for that, but we should admit that we all do this.

The Chair: OK. Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Fonseca: Being a new member and coming into this Legislature two years ago, the BlackBerry is all I know. As soon as we came in, BlackBerries were in our hands, and it would seem very difficult to do my job today without the BlackBerry. I don't know how long it took the evolutionary process to get to BlackBerries. It must have been quite quick; it seemed like it just happened. I don't know if it had to be approved before it was.

Mr. Peterson: Ernie would like to answer a technological question.

Mr. Hardeman: I think the BlackBerries came in when the Liberal government came in, because the funding form changed. That's when I got them. I had been here nine years before then, but I'd never had one, but I got it because now it's not part of your office budget; it's paid by the Leg. Assembly.

Mr. Fonseca: I'm just thinking that even at that time, when I was working in the private sector, very few people, two years ago, had a BlackBerry. Actually, I should have bought BlackBerry stock—RIM, a great Ontario company—because the stock has gone up 400% if we had bought in two years ago. We missed that one.

In regard to moving beyond the BlackBerry and bringing other technological devices into the Legislature like the laptop, I really feel that we will evolve to that. I don't know how obtrusive it is on the desk. Where I, as a member, would feel they would be obtrusive would be people punching away at the keys and all that noise, you know, if everybody's punching away at their keys. But it seems that here, just working on the Hansard, I never really hear it. I don't know how many keys you're punching away at there—

Interjection: One.

Mr. Fonseca: Yes. So right there, it doesn't seem like a problem.

I have not had a chance to go to the Ottawa Parliament to see how they use theirs and how they put them down etc. I don't know how long they've been doing that, but if it's not a problem there, why would we think it's a problem here? Why are we different than what is happening in Ottawa? I don't see that as an issue. I would hope that we would evolve to the point where we can get a lot of our work done.

As Mr. Peterson said, a lot of our work does come in electronically and needs to be answered electronically. I can say that it is very difficult to work with these, to send e-mails. First, you can't read documents. I don't wear glasses now, but I'm not far away from having to wear glasses because these really kill your eyes. They're very small. It's very difficult.

Mr. Miller: Just for clarification, Ottawa doesn't allow laptops in the main House of Parliament.

The Chair: Yes, they do.

Mr. Sibenik: That's correct. A little bit more than a year ago they were rewired, the entire Commons chamber itself, so that it allows—they have access to the network from members' desks, including the Internet as well, hard-wired.

Mr. Fonseca: Maybe somebody can recall some outrage by the citizens around those laptops, but I never read anything about it. It's not like it hit the headlines and people were screaming bloody murder, "Get rid of those laptops; they're not doing their job." People probably think they're doing a better job. I have to say that I think it's evolutionary. We should move to laptops. We should look at best practices and what is least obtrusive to those watching on TV and to the members in the chamber as they are trying to deliver their speeches and debate on various pieces of legislation.

The Chair: Everybody has had one, and in many cases two, cracks at this. I'd like to propose the following, and let's see if this can assist us in moving forward: In looking at the comments, Mr. Sergio's opinion was to keep computers out of—

Mr. Bisson: Hey, you're using technology there.

The Chair: I am using technology, and I freely admit it.

Mr. Sergio's comments were to keep computers out of the chamber. Mr. Miller said BlackBerries are OK. Mr. Marchese, among other things, said in addition to technology, let's also ban newspapers. Ms. Di Cocco said no to computers. Mr. Peterson feels that laptops and tablets are OK; look for an access point. Mr. Hardeman concurred on banning newspapers. If there's one consensus we seem to be drifting toward, it's a ban on newspapers. We may be technologically savvy, but we're consigning paper to the wastepaper basket. Mr. Bisson is looking at Wi-Fi access and talking about the evolution of software. Ms. Sandals is affirming the use of BlackBerries and suggesting we set a policy around it. Mr. Fonseca feels that we're going to evolve in some manner toward the use of computers in the chamber. Am I encapsulating this fairly accurately?

Let's see if we can break it down into a couple of decisions. A decision would be a yes or a no on, "Should we ban computers altogether?" If we choose not to ban them altogether, then it would be, "Under what circumstances should we permit computers/tablets?" At this point, we've not discussed the use of BlackBerries, which everybody seems to feel are already ubiquitous. The policy, such as it is, has evolved from ad hoc rulings by the Speaker. It would probably be appropriate for this committee to set that policy by the members, rather than to continue to rely on ad hoc rulings by the Speaker. In encapsulating, is that an acceptable thing to request a motion on?

Mr. Bisson: You've got to be careful about how you word the motion. That's where we're going to have all the problems.

Mr. Peterson: You've got a tablet, and I've got a BlackBerry. I think people would agree with BlackBerries and tablets, but not computers with screens that flip up and are obtrusive.

Mr. Bisson: Is that a tablet?

The Chair: That's a tablet.

Mr. Bisson: Can you actually run software on that?

The Chair: I am.

Mr. Bisson: No. I'm saying, can you actually call up let's say your e-mail, as it's in tablet format?

The Chair: Not only can I call it up, but at home, where I have my wireless access point, I seldom use the tablet on either an AC line or wired. I use it always—

Mr. Bisson: But my question is, when you have it in tablet form, are you able to access software, navigate software and navigate the Internet?

The Chair: The question was, am I able to access software, navigate the software and navigate the Internet? Not only am I able to access it, but in plain vanilla word, using this pen, I can input into Word, which will translate it into text. I'll show you later.

Mr. Bisson: I move that we move for those to be allowed in the chamber. That's non-intrusive. That is not intrusive.

Mr. Bisson: On a point of order: I agree with you, Chair, that you want to put some structure to the decision that we have to make. My nervousness is when you said we were going to vote straight up, straight down, on yes or no for computers. I think it's problematic, because there are certain forms of computer technology that we're already using that are not obstructive.

To try to move this thing ahead, I think we agree on a number of things. Blackberries should be allowed in the Legislature, provided we don't do obstructive things, as Rosario and others have said. I would argue that what you're doing is not obstructive to me. It's a piece of paper. That's the way I see it. You're not typing anything. But laptops I can concede on.

1630

The Chair: I'm trying to lead us toward a motion on which we can make a decision. Caroline, Rosario, Ernie.

Ms. Di Cocco: I think we have to be cautious about this. I say this maybe because I've aged a lot in the last

two years. I don't know. This discussion is certainly very different from the one we had about four years ago in the Legislature, and so it should be. I just want us to please keep in mind what we are doing, what the role is and what the debating chamber is all about. It's a different place than our offices. There's a different role that we're supposed to be playing there.

I'm being a purist about this, because as we evolve in our Legislature, we're forgetting more and more what the intent and what the role of that Legislature is about. I just say with some caution, as we move forward in bringing more and more technology into the Legislature—and maybe it will evolve that way—that I just fear for the underlying reason of what the Legislature is about. It is not our offices; it's not the same as our offices. What we're trying to do by bringing more and more technology there is make it like a mini-office. I just caution us with that. If there is a motion to be made, I think it has to clarify for the Speaker the use of these BlackBerries, because technically they're illegal now. That's what this should be about.

Mr. Marchese: I'm just going to make a point, and then make a suggestion. In terms of debating skills in the Legislature, it's not going to change, whether we have small technology, big technology, newspaper or clippings. Whatever happens in terms of the debate in the Legislature is irrelevant in terms of what we're doing or the means by which we do it. It's not going to make me respectful of the person debating whether I have some technology, a large amount of technology or less technology. That's not the issue. People can debate, and they may not be listening, whether they're reading or not reading or playing with their computers.

It's up to the individual across the way to either listen to you or not, or for you to listen to me or not, based on whether you're interested or not, or whether you have to respond and so on. For the government members, it's worse. Most New Democrats are always debating because we have to; we don't have to worry about technology, because we're always busy. But for some of you, 18 would be sitting there, thinking, "What am I going to do?" because you may or may not be listening to us. It's not going to make you more respectful.

Mrs. Sandals: There are days when I tune you out.

Mr. Marchese: There you go, and I understand.

My argument had to do with the impression we give to the general public. That's about all; it's more the semblance of being respectful than actually being respectful, because if we're quiet, it doesn't mean that we're respectful of the member speaking. I have to admit that Tim made a good point, Gilles made a good point and then Liz made a good point by way of saying that if we're not going to move to something else, we should be looking at how we accommodate the Blackberry in the most unobtrusive of ways. I thought that was a good suggestion.

But the other suggestion that might make sense is your tablet, which is a bit bigger than I would like, but it's quite possible that the other members we haven't in-

quired of might think it's a good idea. So I wanted to propose to you, rather than moving a motion—we may or may not need to—we could go back to our caucuses respectively and say, "Look, do you think having a tablet in the Legislature is something you can live with?" And then maybe we can come back, debate it or move it, and move it as a motion or not, but then we'd have a better sense from our caucuses. By the way, I don't like computers in the old form. I don't like them at all. I don't want to impose my view on others. But a tablet could be less intrusive than something else, and it might accommodate a whole lot of people in terms of them doing their work. So let's go back to our caucuses, put it on the agenda, and then come back.

The Chair: So your proposal is that we take the issue of computers and tablets in the chamber, and that we table that—

Mr. Marchese: Not computers; the tablets.

The Chair: All right. So you're suggesting now—I'm trying to get this down to something specific.

Mr. Marchese: Two things: One is that we review what Liz Sandals suggested, and that is, could the carpenters in this place or the engineers find the least obtrusive way of accommodating the BlackBerry so that it sits somewhere? I don't know how they might do it, but they might have some suggestions.

Interjections.

Mr. Marchese: Possibly. Oh, yes, it's here. Was it there, or here?

But they might devise a way to do it that's not obtrusive.

The second one is, do they think a tablet is acceptable? Can they live with it? Then we'll come back.

The Chair: Is the consensus here that for the purposes of discussion, notebooks are out, but tablets with a stylus like this are OK for the purposes of this decision?

Mr. Marchese: Let's ask our caucuses.

The Chair: OK. Mr. Hardeman, you had a point to make.

Mr. Hardeman: I think it's very important. I'm somewhat changing sides. I agree that the tablet the Chair is using is no more intrusive than me trying to work my BlackBerry, but that, to me, doesn't make any difference. That means we've got to do a better job of working the BlackBerry appropriately.

I totally agree with Ms. Di Cocco: The purpose of being in the Legislature is not the same as the purpose of being in our office. I point to the number of jurisdictions that were mentioned. Westminster was mentioned in England. They don't have computers. They don't even have desks for their members. They just have public desks, because the only reason they're there is for the debate. Then they go to their office and do their work. I don't know why we would want to say that we should find a way to make my desk in the Legislature my office.

The one other problem that I have is, if we're going to do that and we've decided that that's the important place for members to do their business, I want to know if I get two desks, because in order for me to properly run that

computer, I have to bring my assistant in. Why not? I mean, she's a person, and why should I, as a member of the Legislature, not be accommodated the same way as everyone else, that I am incapable of doing it myself but I have a right to have it done? So why would I not get a second seat?

I think more important than technology is the issue of what it is we're supposed to be doing in the Legislature. I think that's really what we need to decide, and I would suggest, if we're going to move forward at all, that we should deal with, as to BlackBerries, Palm Pilots, electronic organizers, watches, where you draw the line of what's allowed and what isn't.

Mr. Marchese: But I made a suggestion. Do you want me to move it as a motion? Is that useful, or what?

Mr. Bisson: I can feel a motion coming.

The Chair: I can feel a motion coming too.

By the way, just as a note, your suggestion on the assistant isn't as far-fetched as it sounds. In the Michigan state Legislature, I believe the state legislators, in addition to voting electronically, have their assistants physically present in the room.

Mr. Hardeman: In Washington state, every member's desk has a telephone that rings out loud if somebody wants to call him. But they only meet once every three years.

Mr. Marchese: Do you need a motion, or is it acceptable to the caucuses?

The Chair: I'm looking for a motion here.

Mr. Marchese: I move that we respectively take this issue to the caucus to deal with two matters, and maybe others. The two that we talked about that there's possibly some agreement on: one, the BlackBerry, that the caucuses speak to the issue of a BlackBerry and find a way to accommodate the BlackBerry on a desk so that it can be used in the least obtrusive way; and secondly, to inquire with our caucuses about whether or not having a tablet, the least intrusive tablet—and that's a difficult one, as there is so much technology.

Mr. Peterson: As a computer with a screen that doesn't pop up.

Mr. Bisson: No keyboard. A non-keyboard type.

1640

Ms. Di Cocco: The word "tablet" is very Biblical. It has the same—

Mr. Marchese: Whatever. Is Tim's suggestion useful?

Mrs. Sandals: The issue is that you don't want things that—

Mr. Marchese: That flip over, that flip up—no flip-up. A tablet without a flip-up.

Interjection: It's called a notepad.

Mr. Marchese: So more or less those two.

The Chair: OK. I understand.

Mr. Marchese has moved that the committee formulate a policy on BlackBerries—

Mr. Marchese: That we go back to our caucuses to canvass them on two matters: (1) the BlackBerry and how we might accommodate it on the desk and,

(2) whether or not the caucuses agree that we should have a—

Mr. Bisson: Notepad.

Mr. Marchese: A notepad?

The Chair: A tablet.

Mr. Marchese: Let's say "tablet," because I think we know what we mean by it. OK?

Mr. Hardeman: Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: Mr. Hardeman, are you speaking to the motion? We do have a motion on the floor now.

Interjection: Do we need a seconder?

The Chair: We don't need a seconder. We're in questions and comments. Are you speaking to the motion?

Mr. Hardeman: It's a question and comments to the motion and the appropriateness of the motion. I guess my concern is in the motion itself. The reason we're having this debate is because the Speaker wanted this committee to make recommendations to him as to what should be done. If we support this motion, it effectively says that the government side of the House should decide what we're going to do about technology in the Legislature, because whatever recommendation comes back from caucuses, the government side is always going to carry the day. So whatever they decide, that's what is going to happen.

Interjections.

Mr. Hardeman: That's what it sounds like. When the members of the Liberal caucus go back to their caucus and come back and say, "We don't—

Interjections.

The Chair: OK, let's do this one at a time.

Interjections.

Mr. Hardeman: Yes, but when it comes—

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Hardeman: I believe I have the mike, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Hardeman, you still have the floor.

Mr. Hardeman: Thank you.

The problem is that when we come back here with three recommendations, unless mine is the same as the governing party's, the number of votes at this committee will always carry the position of the Liberal caucus. So what we're really saying as a committee is, we don't want to make recommendations; we want the government to decide it for us. I think we should be making recommendations to the caucuses.

Interjections.

Mr. Sergio: OK. Read the motion.

Mr. Marchese: Bob, can I also add that whenever a decision is made, it requires consensus from the three caucuses? Is that a good idea?

Mr. Bisson: That's fair.

Ms. Di Cocco: I think that's a reasonable way to look at this—

Mr. Marchese: Can I add that we have to have consensus?

Ms. Di Cocco: —that we ask our caucus. This is déjà vu, because that's exactly what happened four years ago. Everybody did go back to their caucuses because it's

important enough that it affects everybody as well. We're certainly divided—

Mr. Marchese: Yes. I can't speak for caucus.

Ms. Di Cocco: —in the sense that there's a discussion. The member made the motion. It's not like the motion came from the government side.

Mr. Marchese: But let's not spend so much time on it.

Ms. Di Cocco: I don't want to go there either. I personally feel it's a good approach, because it settles on accommodating the BlackBerry and the aspect of going to the caucus and discussing with our caucuses, with our colleagues, what their views are. I don't know what their views are.

Mr. Marchese: But are people willing to add—

The Chair: One at a time.

Mr. Sergio: Mr. Chairman, we'll never finish if we go back and forth all the time. We might as well—

The Chair: Speaking to the motion, Mr. Sergio.

Mr. Sergio: I have no problem sending both to the three caucuses. My problem is that, according to the motion of Mr. Marchese, he suggests that we recommend the use of the BlackBerry already. I have a problem with that. I think both should go to caucuses and say, "With respect to BlackBerries and whatever you want to call it, go—"

Mr. Bisson: That's what he's saying.

Mr. Sergio: No.

Mr. Bisson: Yes.

Mr. Sergio: If you read his motion, it says, "recommending the use of the BlackBerry and to look at the other possibilities." So if we're going there with a positive recommendation from this committee on the BlackBerries—

Mr. Bisson: It's not a recommendation. You're going to sound out your caucus. You're going to hear what your caucus has—

Mr. Sergio: Rosario, can you read your motion?

The Chair: May I suggest something?

Mr. Sergio: Why don't we go to caucuses for both?

Interjections.

The Chair: Order. A five-minute recess to enable Mr. Marchese to get that motion in writing so that—

Mr. Marchese: We don't want to stay here all day.

The Chair: Nobody wants to stay here all day. If we're going to vote on this motion, may I request it in writing.

Mr. Marchese: Do we really need it—

Mr. Bisson: That's why we have the clerk. It's an easy motion.

Mr. Marchese: Mario raises a good concern. We don't need the five members. The idea is to go back to the caucus to get their—

Mr. Bisson: Direction.

Mr. Marchese: —not approval, necessarily, but to canvass them on the use of BlackBerries and how they could be accommodated, if they agree. Do they agree to have a BlackBerry? And if so, how to accommodate it, and do they agree to have a tablet in the Legislature?

The Chair: May the Chair make the following suggestion?

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: He wants to get rid of them.

Mr. Marchese: No, I thought Liz's suggestion was useful in terms of accommodating, if people think it's a good idea, because everybody is using them now, right?

Interjections.

The Chair: Order. May the Chair make this suggestion to you? I'd like to move from this topic and, with the indulgence of the committee, come back on the motion that I'm hoping you're going to write down for us, and talk about the issue of some of the technology that we've discussed in the east and the west lobby, the dining room, the committee rooms and other venues.

Can I suggest that you get that motion down on paper, and with the indulgence of the committee, do I have unanimous consent to come back to this motion to vote on it when we've got it down on paper? OK.

Mr. Hardeman: My question, again, is on priority or on process. I think the discussion on technology anywhere else is going to hinge on some of the decisions that are going to be made about what we're going to do in the Legislature. It's kind of hard for me to sit here and debate against putting computers or allowing laptops in the east and west lobby when we're going to come back or could come back with recommendations that we're going to allow them at every desk in the Legislature. I think it's kind of the cart before the horse as to how we can properly debate expansion.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Bisson: Well, they're very separate issues. If you use the logic that you, Ms. Di Cocco, have used, you argue that the use of these technologies in the House takes away from the decorum of the House. We're not talking about the House. We're talking about giving Wi-Fi technology to the building, so that people like Mr. Peterson and others, who don't have offices in this building, can walk in, sit down at the park bench or sit in the dining room, or go into the members' lobby and access the Internet by Wi-Fi. It has nothing to do with the chamber. I think that's a good idea, and I would so move.

The Chair: The Chair rules that in fact they are two separate issues.

Mr. Bisson: That's right. And I so move.

The Chair: Could you perhaps phrase your motion in terms of something—in other words, you're moving that we do allow Wi-Fi access—

Mr. Bisson: To the building.

The Chair: To the entire building?

Mr. Bisson: It excludes the chamber, obviously, because we haven't dealt with the chamber.

The Chair: That's not what I hear. Now, we've set aside the chamber, but other than the chamber—

Mr. Bisson: The building.

The Chair: The building. OK.

Mr. Bisson: That means the east and west lobby, that means the bathrooms, that means the dining room, that means my office; that means all of it.

The Chair: So you've moved that, separate and apart from the chamber, Wi-Fi access be enabled throughout the legislative building.

Ms. Di Cocco: Point of order.

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: It's part of technology these days. Never mind the cost. It's how we do our jobs. They have it at the airport. They've got it at the coffee shop, for God's sake. You Luddites; I'm telling you.

Mr. Hardeman: On a point of order, Mr. Chair: On the appropriateness of the resolution, my question is, are there any restrictions on the access today? This committee is not empowered to instruct the installation, only the rules, whether they're allowed or not allowed. The installation would have to go to the Board of Internal Economy.

Our purpose here is to discuss what needs to be changed in the rules and regulations and the standing orders to deal with technology in the precinct, so I'm not sure that saying we want Internet around the building—we're not discussing the chamber at the present time. I'm not sure that it requires a change of standing orders to do that. So then it's a matter for the Board of Internal Economy, not a matter for this committee.

1650

The Chair: Thank you.

A motion from Mr. Bisson would be out of order because it is Mr. Marchese who is the committee's representative.

Mr. Bisson: I'm writing it out as we speak.

The Chair: While the Chair accepts your point, such motions should be moved by Mr. Marchese. Before we deal with that, Mr. Marchese has written down his previous motion, and it reads as follows:

"That members of the committee take the issue of the use of BlackBerries and tablet computers back to their respective caucus and report the results of the discussions back to this committee."

Discussion, if any? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Bisson: We have another motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: Monsieur Marchese moves that Wi-Fi technology be made available throughout the Legislative Building.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: That would suggest that you could use it in any little corner of the building rather than be specific. Does that worry people?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: "Legislative Building."

Mr. Bisson: You can say "precinct" if you want, "legislative precinct."

Mr. Marchese: "In the legislative precinct"?

The Chair: It's your motion.

Mr. Hardeman: "Legislative Building."

Mr. Marchese: The building.

Mr. Hardeman: No, the precinct includes the other buildings.

Interjections.

Mr. Marchese: Well, you're not going to have it outside, are you?

Interjections.

The Chair: Just for clarification, in making that motion, does "throughout the precinct" include the legislative chamber?

Mr. Marchese: I would think—you would argue yes.

The Chair: For clarity, may I suggest that you put that in?

Mr. Marchese: So the Legislative Building and the—

The Chair: "Including the legislative chamber." Just for clarity.

Mr. Marchese: In the precinct—

Mr. Bisson: It's a moot point if it's in the chamber. You haven't got the technology to use it, so what—

The Chair: OK. May I suggest that that go into the motion?

Mr. Marchese: Sure.

The Chair: OK. Could you please read the motion one more time?

Mr. Marchese: I move that Wi-Fi technology be made available throughout the precinct, as I said earlier, and that would include the Legislative Assembly—or the legislative—

Mr. Bisson: Chamber.

Mr. Marchese: Chamber, building, whatever you—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Marchese has moved that Wi-Fi access be made available throughout the legislative precinct, which includes the legislative chamber.

Discussion? Ms. Di Cocco. Ms. Sandals afterwards.

Ms. Di Cocco: I guess the only question I have is, does that then not predetermine what we're going back to our caucuses for, first of all? And second, particularly for parliamentary assistants who aren't in the building, access to their offices and access to information, when you say "legislative precinct," could we word it in such a way that we're saying to make the technology available in the members' lounges or in some of the—because there are people who don't even have a place. They were saying cubicles of some sort, to accommodate the members to get access to their offices or to the e-mails they need or whatever it is that we want to do? And add to that, if we could, that maybe they should look at accommodating members, period, within the area, here or at the Whitney Block, instead of having parliamentary assistants. Could we add that extra piece to it: instead of having them in other parts of the ministries, having offices here between the—or is that not in our mandate?

The Chair: I'm not sure I understand your request.

Ms. Di Cocco: Anything that I'm saying. OK. All right. The motion is to accommodate technology within the precinct, period. That's the motion.

The Chair: Provide Wi-Fi access, 802.11g access.

Ms. Di Cocco: I misunderstood the motion. I was speaking on something that I misunderstood. I do apologize for taking up the time.

Mrs. Sandals: I guess this is procedural, because I'm the visitor and I don't understand what we have the

authority to do. Is this something where we should be asking somebody to investigate the cost of installing it at various—I just don't have a clue what the cost of this is that we're asking for. I don't know what it would cost to provide access. And do we want access throughout the building for the entire world, or is the issue access for members?

The Chair: Mrs. Sandals points out that the motion itself is rather global and asks, is this everywhere? Mr. Marchese, although it's your motion, you're pointing out that it's only a couple of places, but that's not the way the motion reads.

Mr. Marchese: You're quite right. I'm just hoping that it would be on the understanding that—we're talking about having access outside of the legislative chamber. We were thinking in the east and west lobbies, the library, the committee meetings.

The Chair: Do you wish to amend the motion so as to narrow its scope, so that when the committee makes a recommendation—

Mr. Marchese: I guess. I thought you had talked to a number of people and we had a better understanding of what we're talking about, but yes, OK.

The Chair: If the Chair may, the scope of what we had discussed informally prior to the meeting was to provide 802.11g wireless—in other words Wi-Fi access—in the following locations: the east and west lobbies, all committee rooms, the legislative dining room, the library and, at the request or the acceptance of each caucus, the caucus rooms themselves.

Mr. Marchese: Caucus rooms—good idea. Exactly.

The Chair: Period.

Mr. Marchese: At the moment, yes.

Mr. Miller: Depending on the response you get in the feedback from the caucuses, if in fact the feedback from the caucuses is that the tablets would be fine in the chamber, then we would also at that point—

The Chair: In fact, these are two separate issues. We have one issue to address the use of technology in the chamber. This motion restricts Wi-Fi access to certain areas outside the chamber so that the two are independent, as I understand it.

Mr. Marchese: Yes, Bob, but we could refer that to caucus too, if people think that's useful to do. I don't think we need to, but if people feel strongly, then we could refer that as well.

The Chair: Do you wish to amend the motion?

Mr. Marchese: I'm just getting a quick sense without debate. Let's refer that to caucus as well, otherwise we're going to be debating forever.

Mr. Sergio: Notwithstanding all of that, I have no problem sending whatever direction to our caucus, but following the direction that we got from the Speaker, all he says is one thing: "I'm writing to request that the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly undertake a review of the use of technology in the chamber." That does not speak of anything else.

Mr. Marchese: The Speaker makes a recommendation—

Mr. Sergio: Hold on a second. I said, notwithstanding what we have spoken about—motions, whatever—there is only one address, one direction from the Speaker of the House. Shall we limit ourselves strictly to that or do we want to go beyond—

Mr. Marchese: Yes, we do what we want.

Mr. Sergio: —and advise the Speaker as well that we want to look beyond the chamber?

Mr. Bisson: First of all, the Legislative Assembly committee, this committee, can decide what it wants to deal with. That's within the purview of the rules. So if we decide to expand it, it's up to us. We've been given an issue to look at on behalf of the Speaker which looks at the chamber, but we can go beyond that.

As far as the Wi-Fi motion, I just want people to understand—and I think most of us do understand—that it would be very hard to wire up this building so that the signal doesn't go into the chamber, doesn't splash over certain parts of the building, because that technology doesn't work in squares. You know what I'm saying? It's technology; it's a radio wave. The reason I was saying we should put Wi-Fi across the building, when I meant all the building, is even though the signal goes into the chamber—there are all kinds of signals in that chamber now, if you know what I mean. The point is, if you don't have the technology to use it, you wouldn't be able to access it. Putting Wi-Fi across the building doesn't do anything to hurt people's concern when it comes to technology in the chamber, because if you don't have the technology to use the signal, it's a moot point.

Let's move a motion.

1700

Mr. Miller: I have a question to do with the cost of Wi-Fi technology, and also whether we need to get approval, or whether in that motion it has to say "subject to approval from the Board of Internal Economy," in terms of the cost of the whole thing—just some idea. You're very familiar with the technology, Chair. It would be my thought that it's not, relatively, an expensive process to go through, is it, to set up this technology in the building?

Mr. Bisson: It's only a recommendation.

The Chair: The scope of the discussion here—Peter is taking some of the discussion. Perhaps Mr. Marchese would consider an amended version of his motion. If so, perhaps we could vote on it. In answer to your question, 802.11 wireless is very economical to install.

Mr. Miller: It's basically a transmitter that transmits—

The Chair: For example, in this room, if you put one on the ceiling, it's an access point that's under \$200 and wiring itself is about a dollar a foot.

Mr. Miller: I say we vote on that matter, then.

Interjections.

The Chair: Mr. Sibenik is just taking these suggestions and turning them into an amended version of Mr. Marchese's motion, which, if it's acceptable to him, perhaps we can read.

Mr. Marchese, does that encapsulate what you had intended in your original motion?

Mr. Marchese: Based on what you said, yes.

The Chair: Would you read it?

Mr. Marchese: That Wi-Fi technology be made available in the east and west lobbies, the legislative dining room, the library, the committee rooms and the caucus rooms.

Mr. Bisson: You're excluding all the offices?

Mr. Marchese: Yes.

The Chair: Discussion?

Mr. Marchese: Without too much debate, we could either refer this—

Interjections.

The Chair: Mr. Marchese has moved that—

Mr. Marchese: We can either vote for this, if you're ready, or if you think we need to refer it to our caucuses, we could do that. Are you ready to vote on this?

Mr. Bisson: No.

Mr. Marchese: OK, then I'll move it as a motion and we'll deal with it now.

The Chair: Mr. Marchese has made the motion. Discussion?

Mr. Bisson: Very quickly, because I don't want to make this longer. Poor Mr. Peterson won't be able to come to anybody's office and use his laptop, under that motion. That's why I said "the building." I don't know why we're getting to name the rooms of the building. Poor Mr. Peterson, if he goes to visit Mrs. Sandals, will not be able to use his laptop. Make it the building.

Interjections.

The Chair: Comments will please be directed to the Chair.

Mr. Marchese: Can I add that we refer this to our caucuses as well for discussion, and bring this back?

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor. Let's get the motion dealt with. Are we ready for the vote?

Those in favour? Those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Marchese: I would like to refer this for the caucuses to discuss and bring back their discussion.

Mr. Bisson: This doesn't need to be referred back to caucus.

Mr. Marchese: Yes, because some of you have concerns: Maybe it should be somewhere else in the building and in the offices. I'm OK with this.

Mr. Hardeman: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order: Far be it for me to pick on the senior member of our committee, but when you've passed a motion, you have given direction of the committee; you don't ask for further input in order to help you make the decision. It's either a motion passed or it's not a motion passed.

The Chair: Rosie, he's right. You've got to accept it. You just made a decision here.

Is there anything else that we had to deal with? Are there any further matters to deal with here? Mr. Miller, you had a comment.

Mr. Miller: No. I'll talk to you afterwards.

The Chair: Motion to adjourn?

Mr. Marchese: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Marchese has moved adjournment.

All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

The committee adjourned at 1706.

CONTENTS

Thursday 17 November 2005

Subcommittee report	M-3
Use of technology	M-3

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