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**Official Report
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Tuesday 29 July 2008

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 29 juillet 2008

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Review of provisional
standing orders

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Révision du
Règlement provisoire

Chair: Bas Balkissoon
Clerk: Tonia Grannum

Président : Bas Balkissoon
Greffière : Tonia Grannum

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Tuesday 29 July 2008

Mardi 29 juillet 2008

The committee met at 1401 in committee room 1.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I call to order the meeting of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly for a review of the provisional standing orders.

Item number 1 on the agenda: If I could have the report of the subcommittee.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Your subcommittee on committee business met on Thursday, July 3, 2008, to consider the method of proceeding on the review of the standing orders, and the recommendations are the following:

(1) That the committee meet in Toronto on Tuesday, July 29, 2008, starting at 2 p.m., and on Wednesday, July 30, 2008, starting at 9 a.m., for consultations and discussion.

(2) That the committee meet in Toronto on Monday, August 11, 2008, for report-writing, starting at 9 a.m.

(3) That if more than three meeting days are needed, the committee may determine additional dates at a later time.

(4) That the committee clerk invite the Clerk of the House, the Speaker, the director of broadcast and recording and the director of Hansard to appear before the committee on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 29, 2008, and the morning of Wednesday, July 30, 2008.

(5) That the Clerk of the House be offered 30 minutes in which to make a presentation and that the other presenters be offered 20 minutes in which to make a presentation.

(6) That each party submit the names of three expert witnesses that they would like to invite to appear before the committee on Tuesday, July 29, 2008. These names must be submitted to the committee clerk by 12 noon, Monday, July 14, 2008.

(7) That the expert witnesses be offered 20 minutes in which to make a presentation.

(8) That the committee clerk, with the authority of the Chair, post a notice on the Ontario parliamentary channel and the committee's website requesting written submissions from the public on the changes to the standing orders. The notice is to be posted as soon as possible.

(9) That the deadline for written submissions be 5 p.m., Friday, July 25, 2008.

(10) That the research officer provide information on the total number of hours of debate and the number of bills passed in the spring session of 2008, and provide comparison figures for the spring session of 2007.

(11) That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, be authorized, prior to the passage of the report of the subcommittee, to commence making any preliminary arrangements necessary to facilitate the committee's proceedings.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Kormos?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly. We have but two days to hear from participants in this committee process, and the New Democrats want to make it clear that we remain incredibly disappointed that when the standing order revision proposal was advanced by the government, it was done without any consultation, discussion or even notice to the opposition parties. The purported process of discussion with the government House leader, Mr. Bryant, consisted of consecutive meetings that demonstrated themselves, after the fact, to have been but stonewalling on the part of Mr. Bryant and were a very clumsy effort on the part of the government to feign negotiation when, in fact, there was no negotiation.

We're similarly disappointed that the government has not disclosed any agenda that it might be bringing to this committee process. The New Democrats—and the Tories may well have their own comments to make in this regard, but the Tories have been consistent with the New Democrats—have made it clear that the focus of our concern is the timing of question period. We believe that question period is the highlight of the parliamentary day and that it is best positioned at a time after the noon hour when it is more readily accessible by the public, both in person at Queen's Park and by the media, the press, as well as more readily accommodating hard-working staff of all three parties as well as legislative staff who spend most of their working day focusing on question period and the contents of question period.

We've also been very clear that we understand the government's interest in replacing evening sittings with sittings at other points during the day when the House traditionally did not sit, and we have demonstrated our willingness to sit at 9 a.m. in the morning to engage in debate. However, we note that the attendance at those morning sittings is even more pathetic than it was inclined to be in the late-night evening sittings, although perhaps not quite as raucous, perhaps because people

weren't inclined to consume the same meals for breakfast as they were for dinner, or at least ate breakfast in unlicensed premises, rather than taverns and beer halls. There has regrettably been—I just read Morton Shulman's memoir of his time here at Queen's Park, and he commented on the overt drunkenness of evening sittings, as well as the soporific government backbenchers, one of them, Ellis Morningstar, whom he photographed in the Legislature asleep during a daytime sitting. Of course, that was the first time that there was any record of people smuggling a camera into the legislative chamber and photographing the goings-on.

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We've been very clear: We're prepared to accommodate the government; we're prepared to tweak; we're prepared to do whatever has to be done. And we understand the government has an agenda. It has a legislative agenda, it has a goal and it has a time frame within which it wants to achieve that goal. We have attempted since we came back here after the election to demonstrate our capacity to be collaborative while in no way, shape or form abandoning our role as opposition. We have been co-operative in terms of signalling which bills require less and which bills require more debate time—according to the opposition, at least—and we've been very generous, I believe, in indicating how many members we're going to have speaking to a given piece of legislation, whether it's one member or two members or a whole three-line whip—all 10 members—of that small but mighty NDP caucus. I believe that it is a healthier Parliament when that sort of co-operation is engaged in. However, that sort of co-operation doesn't have to be the case. We would very much like to maintain that, because I also believe it contributes to a greater level of civility.

I want to ask members of this committee to understand clearly that our goal over the course of today, tomorrow and August 11 will be to have this committee recommend that question period be restored to a 1 o'clock slot. During the course of discussion we'll amplify on that. We've got these wacky Tuesdays and wacky Wednesdays where you've got these huge holes during the day. Quite frankly, what happens is that government members, and especially cabinet ministers, simply disappear unless they're the ones who are whipped into House duty. It creates confusing days for the public because there are huge holes. We've also got a ministerial statement disjointed from question period, which makes it very difficult sometimes for our critics to be available with that huge gap in between the two events of the legislative day. We also believe that our staff, as well as legislative staff and other caucus staff, deserve to have a more comfortable time frame within which to prepare for question period.

We could expedite this whole process. I indeed asked Mr. Bryant some time ago—and he was disinclined to respond—and I recall asking Ms. Mitchell during the subcommittee meeting—she was in attendance on behalf of the government; what the agenda was, what things the government was looking forward to, because we can deal

with these quickly; there's probably a whole lot that we can agree on. I similarly would ask the government to let us know now whether there is going to be any consideration of restoring question period to a 1 o'clock, or thereabouts, time slot. Because if there isn't, you're yanking our chain, we're playing games—and it doesn't have to be the case. We have been very candid. We wish the government would be candid as well. The government can do whatever it wishes with the standing orders—and it has demonstrated not only its ability to do so but its willingness to do so—without consultation.

I look forward to the next three and a half years as being productive ones for this Parliament rather than years of antagonism. We can go a long way towards achieving that here and now.

Those are my comments I wanted to make very clear at the onset. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. Witmer.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I would certainly agree with much of what has been said by Mr. Kormos. Regrettably, the changes to the standing orders came about without any negotiation with the members of the opposition. I think we first heard about them when the media had received the information; we received it after the fact. So there was no discussion, there was no debate, there was no opportunity for us to provide any input.

At the end of the day, we want to co-operate with the government, and I do believe that we did co-operate. I think this was a session where the three parties did try to work well together, based on the knowledge of some 18 years that I've been here now. But the main change that we would like to see would be the change of question period, and that would be having it at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. We believe that the current schedule that we have is really quite chaotic. There is a lack of certainty as to when anything is happening, and the early start of question period really makes it difficult for staff and research and many other people to prepare properly. So that would be our number one request.

The other request we would have is that we would have routine proceedings—as I say, if we start at 1 o'clock and then we continue with members' statements, introduction of bills, and statements by ministries and responses, right now I think it's embarrassing to see the number of people, or lack thereof, in the House in the afternoon when many of these things are happening. In fact, I don't think MPPs are as well informed as to what might be in the statements, what the concerns of the public are, what the minister has just announced, what the responses might be, based on the nature of the fact that every day right now is different. There is absolutely no order. We have huge breaks in the middle of the day. As you know, we have the caucuses meeting in the afternoon. I believe that if we were to have an order that took us from 1 o'clock to 6 o'clock or 1 o'clock to 6:30, private members—I think we have to take a look at private members' hour because I think there's less respect today for private members than ever before. It's at the end of the day on Thursday. Most people have fled

this place by then, and there's very little interest. As I say, I just think on the whole MPPs collectively are less well informed as to what's going on in the Legislature with this chaotic schedule we have now, which seems to lack any certainty or any coherence, than ever before.

But at the end of the day, if there is one thing that we would ask to be changed—we'll put up with all the rest—it would be bringing question period back to the afternoon at 1 o'clock.

The other issue for some of our members is the Monday morning sittings. That was one of the things that we wanted to raise. We've talked about trying to accommodate families in this Legislature. As you know, some of our members travel a great distance; they don't have the luxury that I do. I can be here in two hours. But do you know what? Some of them, because of travel arrangements, whether it's flights or if they choose to drive, which would be a long drive, have to leave their families on Sunday nights to get here in time for the Monday morning. As you know, the life of an MPP is such that we're all working Fridays, we're working Saturdays, many of us are working Sundays. Sometimes the only time we have with our families for dinner, based on personal experience, is Sunday night. Some people now are placed in a position where they must leave their families on Sunday night in order to be here in time for the question period meeting, which has to be held at least by 8 o'clock every day. So again, if we're trying to encourage this as a place where parents could participate, whether mothers or fathers, I think we have to take a look at also making sure that the hours would correspond to ones that would meet the needs, as long as we get our work done. So I think we need to take a look at any morning session at any time.

That's all I'm going to say right now, but I hope that we're not sitting here spinning our wheels. I hope that there will be changes made. If not, I think it's regrettable because there will still have been no consultation and no opportunity for input from either ourselves or those who are going to be making presentations. If the government is really sincere and wants to make sure that this Legislature, which doesn't belong to the government but belongs to the people in the province of Ontario, best meets the needs of people in the province, obviously, anything that is recommended during the next couple of days should be carefully considered, and I hope the government is prepared to be responsive.

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The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Mitchell.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm just going to keep my comments brief. As I stated in the subcommittee meeting, we committed to the review. Quite frankly, we look forward to hearing from the presenters and the discussion that will come forward from the presentations, and further discussion from that as well. So we thank you for taking the time and coming today. Quite frankly, this is in the best interests of the people of Ontario, that we continue to ensure that Queen's Park functions to the utmost ability that it can in order to ensure that the people of Ontario

have the services they require on a day-to-day basis. So we do thank you for participating in the review.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. Can I have approval of the report of the subcommittee? All in favour? Against? Motion carried.

REVIEW OF PROVISIONAL STANDING ORDERS

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The first deputant, as everybody has been notified, has cancelled out.

KEITH LESLIE

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I understand Mr. Keith Leslie is here, if you wish to come forward. Thank you for being here. You have 20 minutes, and if you could just introduce yourselves for the record.

Mr. Keith Leslie: Absolutely. My name is Keith Leslie. I'm the senior Queen's Park correspondent with the Canadian Press, and with me is Murray Campbell, with the Globe and Mail Queen's Park bureau.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, honourable members, thank you very much for inviting us here today, the press gallery, to appear before you. Let me start by saying I'm much more comfortable holding the microphone and asking the questions, so please bear with me later if I struggle to answer some of your questions.

Our usual role as journalists, of course, is to report on government, to comment about it or just out and out criticize government, to ask it endless questions, not to report to it directly in this type of forum. It's very unusual for us, but I think in this particular case it is appropriate, and it is a recognition of the vital role of a free media in a democratic government. So thank you again for your invitation.

The new timing of question period and cabinet and caucus meetings has directly led to what the press gallery strongly feels is reduced access to cabinet ministers, and that is clearly the biggest concern of the press gallery members. I would also like to say that I miss the old firm timing of private members' bills on Thursdays. Even though there are now three bills a week instead of two, I find the timing has been marginalized by being buried late on Thursdays. Now, that could be just something I have to get used to; it is, after all, change, and it is, as the government says, 50% more time for private members' business. We'll just have to learn to adjust. But I also did manage to miss out on some third reading votes this spring, something I generally try to pay very close attention to. It may be just a matter of getting used to the change and the new schedule, but because these kinds of important votes are now all over the place, it's a little harder for us to keep track of them.

To our main point, though: To say the members of the legislative press gallery are united on the issue of timing of question period or on just about anything else you could possibly think of would be misleading, but there does seem to be near unanimous agreement that having it

end near noon is about the worst of all possible worlds. With question period ending either minutes before or right at noon, all the ministers come rushing out at once. They are probably hungry like the rest of us and are anxious to get out for lunch, although on Tuesdays and Wednesdays they are in a rush to get to their caucus and cabinet meetings now, which are right at noon, at that very same time.

Before, we would wait outside cabinet or caucus meetings—I'm sure most of you have seen us doing this at 9 or 9:30—and we'd have up to an hour, it seemed, or 45 minutes, to scrum and interview different ministers or different government members on their way in. Then we would follow that with a scrum of the Premier. This access was vital to all of us. On Wednesdays and Tuesdays, those access times allowed us to scrum as many ministers as we possibly could on any number of topics. Now, when they all come rushing out at once, you're lucky if you can stop one or two. That's just the reality. Everybody is coming out at once and they are going to many different places, including lunch, and everybody has a 12 o'clock start for something else.

Before, of course, we would have access to those same ministers—even though we'd scrum them Tuesday and Wednesday mornings—when they came out of question period later in the afternoon, and again, because there was still some business going on in the House, whether it was petitions or other business, not everyone came rushing out at once. Ministers tended to come out one or two at a time. There would be conversations in the lounge that kept some others behind, so again, it just gave us a lot more easy access as we were trying to approach cabinet ministers. Everyone now flying out at once makes it very difficult, especially for one-person bureaus, and, as you know, there are more and more one-person news bureaus operating here and everywhere else.

In addition, ending so close to the noon hour or at the noon hour puts our television colleagues and some radio people at a real disadvantage. Most of them are now required to go live on air at noon most days. That, of course, means they can't be in the scrum area following question period, if it ends at quarter to 12; they're getting ready to go on air. In fact, they probably didn't even have time to pay attention to question period if it didn't start until 10 to 11, because that's too late for them to make a noon story out of it, and that means they're going to have to spend that hour looking for a noon story and being prepped to go live at noon. This is the same with a lot of radio people, although they can generally move a little bit quicker because their technology requirements aren't as onerous as those in television. The same thing applies, though: If they can't be in the scrum period following question period and they can't pay attention in question period when it's on, then they're not pitching question period as a noon story.

Question period is always a tough sell for our TV reporters to their producers. Politics is kind of dry and they're looking for much more visual things. It's even harder for the reporters and camera people assigned to

Queen's Park. If they haven't got time to watch it, they can't really make a pitch to their desk that there's an important story coming out of question period. They haven't even had time to look at it. They may look at it later in the day. Again, that's just because we're so tight to that noon timing.

Some of us, including myself, are old enough to have worked around here as reporters when the west turret was full of full-time reporters from Toronto radio stations. Seven or eight Toronto private radio stations kept reporters here. There were two radio networks. There were two news agencies, along with print reporters from London, Hamilton, Ottawa, Kitchener, and TV reporters from those same cities. They're all gone. They are no longer here. There are agencies like myself and CanWest News that fill in some of the holes, but we were here all along; before, those people used to have their own individual voices. They're all gone, save for CFRB radio, which is still here, of course, for Toronto. But all the other privates are gone.

A lot has changed, and quickly, in 21st century journalism, of course. Media mergers and continued 1990s-style downsizing have meant great reductions in the number of news organizations and in the number of them assigning reporters full-time to the Legislature. You can look around this building and just tell that. That means there's a greater dependence on the news agencies like the Canadian Press or our main competition, CanWest News, which is the National Post and CanWest Global Television.

There have been an awful lot of changes. We've seen it all through this building. TVOntario closed its legislative bureau, leaving no one here to cover Ontario politics for the Ontario government-owned TV channel.

But with all that said and all these changes, the noon deadline is still the unofficial start to the news day, especially in the television world, and of course we're all living in a television world, especially in the media. Having question period end at noon makes it near impossible to get a question period story on the noon news. When the bar itself for the noon newscast is much lower—so it's actually easier to get a story on if you've got time to pitch it there. And if you can get a story on the noon news, especially in television, that makes it much easier to pitch that story for a 6 o'clock end-of-day story or a major supertime or late evening newscast, and you'll have all day to develop it. But if you can't get it on at noon, you can barely pitch it again for 6; you're pitching cold against all those other stories that did get on at noon. So it does make it tougher to get question period—which is the main focus of Ontario politics most days—coverage on.

A firm start time is really what the press gallery would love to see more than anything, a firm start and a firm end time, and one that ends, I would think, by 11:15 in the morning. Something at least 45 minutes before the noon hour would be very important to the press gallery.

Now, whether that comes in the afternoon or the morning is entirely up to the members of the Legislature.

The gallery has differing opinions on morning and afternoon. As I say, the only unanimous opinion seems to be that that close to noon really makes it difficult for virtually all of us.

We've all seen the Ottawa question period on television, and it probably makes better television when you look at it because it's much tighter questions and the responses are much, much tighter. While that might be snappy responses and better TV, ours seems to give us more time for actual debate, and policy discussion seems to actually take place, a little bit at least, during some question periods. So we're not advocating adopting their style from Ottawa, but we would advocate a firm start time, which is something they do have in Parliament, and it makes a huge improvement for everyone. To us, a firm start time would be an improvement not only over what happened last spring but also over what was going on prior to it, when question period could start anywhere from 1:45 up till 3 o'clock and even later. Again, moving it at least 45 minutes away from the noon hour would be a great help.

We won't comment on the government's professed goal to make the Legislature more family-friendly and to encourage more young women, mothers in particular, to consider a career in public life, other than to admit that few journalists are really going to miss the night sittings. In fact, I'd venture to say that very few even noticed that the night sittings were gone, except for Eric Dowd, the dean of the gallery, who as you all know was here every night watching every last one of those debates—so someone was here keeping those debates honest. I myself last remember covering an evening debate in 1987, but Murray tells me he covered one on the adoption bill late last year or earlier this year, so they weren't totally without media coverage. But for the most part, I don't think you'll find us complaining about them being missed.

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Again, our bottom line is access to the ministers, more than anything, and trying to move question period just a little bit away from that noon crunch time for us.

Any questions?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): No more comments?

Mr. Murray Campbell: No.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): You're just accompanying him?

Mr. Murray Campbell: I'm here for moral support.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. We have about eight minutes, so we'll split it up three ways, two and a half each. Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate you folks coming in today: It was great to hear. After listening, of course, I know that this is not family-friendly, it's now not filing-friendly, but it certainly is cabinet-friendly.

I wanted to thank you both for attending and talking about some of the issues that the gallery is facing, because, quite honestly, private members' business has been getting significantly reduced coverage for some of the great ideas that we're putting forward. I note the bill

on income splitting: It didn't get as much press as I would have hoped, and it was a substantial debate in terms of public policy. I think it's also an interesting and very valid point that our votes aren't consistent and that it's more difficult for the press to bring that forward.

I do have a couple of questions—just three. In your opinion, what is the most detrimental to access to ministers in the new standing order changes?

Mr. Keith Leslie: I would think it would be the changing of caucus and cabinet meetings to immediately after that noon ending of the House or ending of question period. That's really, really restricted our access to ministers. It's taken away basically two days of access to ministers.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: And that would be probably near to unanimous consent among your members?

Mr. Keith Leslie: As close as we're likely to get in a press gallery, yes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Okay, yes. It's just like politics.

Mr. Murray Campbell: I would agree. There was a certain momentum to the Tuesday morning pre-caucus and pre-cabinet sessions, in which the ministers would come in one by one and answers would feed other questions. By the time we saw the Premier on both those days, there was a sense of momentum.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That actually leads me to my second point, then: Has the media coverage of Queen's Park and the news analysis of some of the stories that we generate suffered as part of these new changes? Is there a decline?

Mr. Murray Campbell: I would think it's too early to judge.

Mr. Keith Leslie: I don't know that we could say that it's suffered. It's changed because we're all trying to change our day around. As I say, I may have missed a couple of votes, but I certainly caught up to them by the end of the day and made sure I interviewed the appropriate people and gave them the coverage that I wanted to give.

Certainly, private members may get a little less attention from—I mean, it is something I always did pay attention to, because it gets the Canadian Press into all those smaller communities that we like to get out into. But again, that may just be a matter of readjusting my schedule, if there's more private members' time, to focus on it more Thursday afternoons instead of the morning. But in the short term, you've spoken a little less.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I certainly appreciate that, coming from one of those smaller communities that does rely on CP from time to time. Some of those issues were being carried and I have noticed a decline.

My final question, then: We have put forward in the Progressive Conservative caucus for our House leader, Mrs. Witmer, some substantial changes to the standing order changes. It would start at 9:30 in the morning, with routine proceedings going from 1 until 6, starting with question period at 1, and with Tuesday caucus meetings back to the normal time; as well as private members' business at 9:30 in the morning until noon, to go back to what was previously agreed upon.

With that in mind, what would be the greatest priority for the press gallery—understanding, I know, that there are various opinions. Would it be a time change for question period? Would it be a change back to cabinet and caucus timetables? A change to private members' business? Or getting a system where there is a consistency in votes? I ask this because I think it's relatively—

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I get you to wrap up?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod:—important that the government understand that we need to compromise on what we've got before us. So I just ask: What would be your biggest priority here today?

Mr. Murray Campbell: I can only speak for myself. As Keith notes, it's like herding kittens to get unanimity in the press gallery. I think the timing for question period is the change that is most objectionable.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Afternoon?

Mr. Murray Campbell: I would prefer a defined early afternoon start.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Kormos.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I think I'm supposed to ask, "Is there anything you'd like to add?" but I'll not ask that.

The other interesting issue—one of the tools that MPPs have here is the media studio and the event of the press conference, the media conference. When the House isn't sitting, it's not problematic. Comment on it—because my sense is that doing a media conference in the afternoon is unwise in terms of having media representatives attend. The morning question period at 10:45 really cramps the style of MPPs who want to use that media room with media attention, at least from Monday through to Thursday. Is that a fair observation?

Mr. Keith Leslie: I think so. Absolutely.

Mr. Murray Campbell: Yes, absolutely, and the same goes for interest groups as well.

Mr. Keith Leslie: We've found—I was mentioning this to one of the Premier's staff who was asking us about this, and of course a lot of the news conferences that we get called away to are by the Premier himself, and they'll be across town. Early on in this spring session with the experiment, the Premier had a briefing—I'm trying to remember—I believe it was at Seneca College. It was up by York University, and it was at 1 o'clock with a deputy minister's technical briefing for us and then a 2 o'clock announcement. We were still doing scrums at 12:30, and to get across town for 1 o'clock is near impossible. But these are logistics things that can be worked out.

The media studio is getting very, very little use in the afternoons since we've switched this, so I think that sort of answers your question as you raise it. Some groups still try to get in in the morning, but that's very difficult now when question period is coming up. Some groups have tried to get in at 9:30. It has proved difficult for them to get the attention they need because everyone is focused on question period later.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Broten.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much for your presentation. I just want to clarify a couple of points that you made. One, you focused on the 24-hour TV world that we are all living in and breathing in right now. You talked about it being easier in terms of an opportunity to get a story on the noon news and that it's probably in the public interest to get some stories out as early as possible, especially if they're of particular interest, and then the development of the story throughout the day. Is there a window in that morning time slot when it's too early for a story, or are we in such a 24-hour cycle that stories that break at 7, 8, 9 or 10 a.m. are still all the stories that develop up until noon?

Mr. Keith Leslie: Absolutely. It is a 24-hour news day now, and it's not just in the television world. Both Murray and I are expected to file for websites the moment we get a story. You'll notice when you go to the Globe and Mail's website or the Toronto Star, it's time-stamped. The story was posted at exactly the timestamp. So everyone is in that same boat.

The noon deadline is kind of artificial in the modern age. That's why I call it the unofficial start to the news day, because absolutely, if you can break something at 7 or 8 a.m., it will still keep running through the day.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I know that one of my colleagues wants to ask a question, so I'll just ask one more question. When you were focusing on the reduced access to cabinet ministers, I wondered if the issue is really the mass exodus as opposed to what time of day it is or where they're going. You used to have people trickle in, because it might have been the first thing they were doing, and you could talk to people as they came in and people arrived at different times. Now, everybody is going en masse out of a room into another room. Is there a solution, some better kind of organization, that we could use on our end that would be of assistance to the press gallery? If everybody didn't come out at the same time, would it be better?

Mr. Keith Leslie: I would think a gap between the noon end of question period and the noon start of cabinet and caucus—literally, everyone is rushing from the one spot to the other. So if there was even a lunch break in there, where they were rushing to get a sandwich—they tend to give up more of their lunchtime than they're willing to give up of cabinet meeting time that's starting firm on them.

Mr. Murray Campbell: The advantage of the former schedule was that ministers' answers could be then bounced off the Premier when he appeared subsequently.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Do you see the Premier now in that same time slot?

Mr. Murray Campbell: He's generally speaking at 9:15, 9:30. Again, speaking personally, there were times in that period when not a lot of questions arose in my head because there wasn't much to bounce off.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Right. I'll pass it to my colleague for the last question.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. Mitchell, you have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Chair, and I will ask this very quickly. You were asked a question specifically about whether or not you did support the Tory proposal. I just wanted to say that when you have the opportunity to review that proposal, there is actually no cabinet slot time, so how would you feel about that part being missed and how do you think that would affect your ability to then access cabinet ministers?

1440

Mr. Keith Leslie: You mean they have no proposal for cabinet times in there?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Right.

Mr. Keith Leslie: There would be a cabinet time somewhere, and we'll be parked either at the beginning of it or at the end of it. That's what we'll do, but we would be curious to know when it was.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's why I just wanted to bring that forward as you were asked a very specific question.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you both for being here. We certainly appreciate your input.

Mr. Keith Leslie: Thank you.

Mr. Murray Campbell: Thank you.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: By the way, welcome to—

Mr. Keith Leslie: Thank you.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: We figured that you're having a good summer.

Mr. Murray Campbell: A month off will do that.

NELSON WISEMAN

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The next deputant is Professor Nelson Wiseman. Welcome, and if you could just state your name for the record.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: My name is Nelson Wiseman. I'm an associate professor in the department of political science at the University of Toronto, and I've been there since 1980.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): You have 20 minutes, but whatever you don't use up the committee has for questions.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I've made some written comments, but maybe I'll just try to synopsise. It's now about 18 minutes to and I'll try to stop maybe by, I don't know, five to or so.

Mr. Chair, honourable members, I appear in front of the committee by invitation but with some hesitation and trepidation because I don't have the experience of the institution that you or that the media representatives do. I come as an academic sitting in my ivory tower, although it's nearby. I do comment on provincial politics in the media.

The invitation was extended by the research director of the NDP, who I do not know, and I want to make it clear that I'm not a member of that party nor any other party. In fact, it'll become quite obvious from my comments that my position is quite different from the NDP's. Unlike Graham White and David Docherty, who were

also invited by the NDP to appear and make submissions, I'm not an authority on legislative procedures.

I have to tell you I've only sat in the gallery three or four times in all of those years. One of the reasons I've come to the gallery so few times is because on the last occasion I attended, a number of years ago, I began to take notes, and a guard immediately approached me and told me that note-taking was not permitted. This seems to me a ridiculous rule, and it lowered my estimation of this institution. How can we ask students to attend and report back what transpired if they're prohibited from making notes on what they see and hear? Can anyone here or anywhere offer a coherent rationale for it? In an era when we're urged to modernize our institutions, which is the rationale for changing the standing orders, why does this prohibition on taking notes by the public persist? I think it dates back to medieval England.

I have read the extended debate regarding the provisional changes to the standing orders. I think it took about three days, and I got 149 pages from Ethan Phillips. I read all of it. One of the things I ran into was the unwelcome, unnecessary and, I thought, unparliamentary utterance of one of the MPPs, but I won't mention him. I found much of the debate repetitive and redundant, and some of the points that were raised I felt were spurious, such as the contention that the change in question period's timing will make it too inconvenient and expensive for a resident of Ottawa or indeed Kenora to attend the gallery. I thought, has anyone come from those locales in the past solely to attend question period? Perhaps—I'd be surprised.

On the whole I found the arguments made by the government members, in my opinion, were more persuasive and logical than many of the objections by the opposition parties. I read Graham White's letter to Howard Hampton where he expressed concerns regarding change in the time for question period. However, I am not alarmed, as he is, that the change will hamper question period's vibrancy or effectiveness. What I do find regrettable, however, is that the government did not seek to find a consensus on the changes with the House leaders of the opposition parties.

My friend Peter Kormos is here. I found his assertions that the changes "disarm the opposition" or keep the media from doing their job somewhat overstated. I don't see the changes as some sort of threat to democracy, nor do I think that they restrict the opposition's ability to hold the government accountable, as was asserted by Mr. Hudak and others.

More important than the time of question period is how many question periods are held. On that score I note, according to your debate, that Ontario had more sitting days last year than any other Canadian Legislature. Ontario also devotes more time to question period than other Canadian Legislatures, and there's been no proposal to shorten it.

The changes in the standing orders have little to do, in my opinion, with accountability, a term that was repeatedly used in the debates. I do not see changes keeping the

minority from being heard, as was asserted by Michael Prue. What is somewhat puzzling to me, however, reading the debate, are the implications of the timing for committee meetings, an issue raised by some MPPs, but I didn't think adequately addressed by the government.

Norm Sterling's proposal to allot a fixed time for opposition members to respond to ministerial statements appears to me to be a good one. He suggested that if ministerial statements take 20 minutes, then opposition members be allotted 10 minutes.

He also had a good point about the softball questions coming from government backbenchers. They are, in my opinion, a waste of time and reflect badly on the backbenchers raising them.

The changes in the standing orders came into effect at the beginning of May, I understand, and the House rose weeks later, on June 18. I cannot say, as a sometime-observer of provincial politics, that I have noticed much difference in media coverage or in other respects. The elimination of regular evening sittings appears reasonable and uncontested in light of all the parties supporting the idea. The revised standing orders provide for more debate time as well, which seems positive if all parties think that more debate is valuable.

We've had a trial period under the provisional standing orders. I suspect the changes, particularly with respect to the time of question period, have not been as negative as opposition members alleged they would be. The changes include rescheduling when, and for how long, private members' bills are debated. The objection that their debate is moved to Thursday afternoon when relatively few MPPs are expected to attend is less important, to my mind, than that private members' bills will receive substantially more time for debate. If MPPs do not attend those debates, they indicate that the bills are not as important to them as the other important duties they perform.

The public relies on the media for news of the Legislature, but this does not mean that the Legislature ought to bend itself to meet the media's preferences. My sense is that relatively few people watch midday newscasts, a concern, as we heard, of many in the media. If important newsworthy issues arise during question period, they will be featured on the supertime and late-evening TV news, which attract larger audiences. Many in the public rely on newspapers, radio and the Internet for their news, so to focus on TV's scheduled newscasts gives them, perhaps, an inflated status they may not deserve.

In my estimation, too much has been made by some in the media of question period's move to the morning. Global TV interviewed me about the change when the proposal was introduced, and I found their questions and interest self-serving. They focused on accommodating their noonday broadcast schedule. If the Legislature caters to the media's agenda—to its pace, its logic—it actually debases itself. It puts the media's cart before the legislative horse. And I would say the same about the media, whose primary job is to report what happened rather than when it happens.

The Hamilton Spectator, the Sudbury Star, the Toronto Star and the Collingwood paper endorsed the standing order changes. The media's position as expressed in a letter from those in the Legislature's press gallery, therefore, is not unanimous. The main media complaints, I believe, are from the TV stations, but their news coverage does not offer the depth of newspapers. Moreover, there's an increasing reliance on the Internet. The 24-hour news cycle makes the timing of question period less significant. In any event, it is the concerns of constituents and the members that ought to drive question period, rather than the latest sensationalist headline or newflash. The question of question period's timing is certainly no freedom-of-the-press issue, as alleged by Mr. Kormos's colleague Cheri DiNovo.

1450

In Ottawa and other provincial jurisdictions there are some morning question periods, without much controversy or consequence. One Ontario Conservative minister said a few years ago that question period does not mean answer period. That is sad and in my opinion is more significant than question period's timing. As Norm Sterling said in debate, if ministers do not answer questions, it doesn't much matter when question period is held. Accountability and ministerial responsibility are compromised in the absence of information and straightforward answers.

One objection raised by the media regarding the change to question period is that they will have less opportunity to scrum ministers. In Ottawa, however, the limitation on ministers being scrummed has not been a function of question period's timing, but of the decision of the government, specifically the Prime Minister's office.

I do not subscribe to the objection by some that the new rules limit meetings between MPPs and interest groups. The meetings will simply occur at different times. I do not believe that any interest groups have come forward to object to the standing order changes, but I might be mistaken. There's been little public response to the changes, I suspect, because in my opinion they do not alarm the public.

The most important rationale for changes in the standing orders must be whether they are consistent with the Legislature's role and the duties of its members. On this score, there seems to be no *prima facie* problem with the change of time for question period, the curtailment of evening sittings or when private members' bills are debated. There is consensus among the parties and the media that evening sessions are not as productive or as constructive as the day sessions.

In Britain, question time, as it is known there, occurs in the first hour of business Monday through Thursday. No question time is held on Fridays. Question time begins at 2:35 on Mondays and Tuesdays, 11:35 on Wednesdays and 10:35 on Thursdays. In Australia and New Zealand, it begins at 2 p.m. It would be interesting to know why the government reportedly—I picked this up in the debate—rejected legislative staff's proposal for

question period at 1 p.m. As for the criticism by the Conservatives that this change to the timing of question period was done arbitrarily by the government, I note that a Conservative government proceeded in such a fashion when it was in office and the changes had substantially greater implications for the government's operations.

In Britain—well, maybe I should just leave you time for questions and make one other comment about my observations about the Legislature. I had some things to say about the Liberals' campaign promises in 2003 respecting the Legislature, but let me end on this: As someone who also deals with constitutional issues, I was startled to see a few years ago that the budget was introduced at a private, corporate facility rather than in the Legislature as is the constitutional convention. Increasingly, spending and taxing measures are first announced outside of the Legislature or in the media. Similarly, I understand that the government leaked to the media the proposed changes to the standing orders before they were introduced into the House. This further degrades the status of the provincial Parliament and ought not to be tolerated. It is regrettable and ought to be critically commented upon and reprimanded, I believe, by the Speaker, for it detracts from your privileges as members and from the House as an institution.

The changes to the standing orders mean reorganized schedules for members and the media. I predict that in coming years, if a government proposes to revert to afternoon question periods or to reschedule the time for private members' bills and to reduce time for their debate or to reinstitute evening sessions, such proposals will be vigorously opposed also as an assault on democracy. The provisional changes in the standing orders, in my opinion, are no such threat.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We have about a minute and a half each. Mr. Kormos.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Professor. You had prepared written material and you only gave us an excerpt from it. Do we have—

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I'm going to send it within the next 24 to 48 hours.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I appreciate that, sir.

Ms. Broten and I made eye contact on your reference to the ban on note-taking. I recall reading the history of that and the proprietary interest of Hansard and so on. The Clerk may well illuminate that for us.

Look, quite frankly, I think you've given us some sobering counsel in general. Maybe some of the things that we'll end up talking about on August 11 will not be specifically addressing the standing order revisions, but may be part of a report that could reflect on the responsibility we have in terms of question period and the role of individual members, as well as conduct in the chamber.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I wanted to talk about conduct in the chamber, which I think is vital. I'm sure you've seen Prime Minister's Question Time on CPAC, and what is striking is the higher calibre of debate, the light-heartedness, the banter—the not constant vilification of

members opposite. It's a joy to watch and it's informative, and it's only held once a week.

Let's remember that Westminster is the template for our Canadian Legislatures. But every Legislature—I've just picked up today that question period here is conducted somewhat differently than in Ottawa. I've rarely seen it here; I'm not available at 2:30 in the afternoon, or I won't be at 10:45, to watch it regularly. Unless the media cover it, and they're only going to show a tiny excerpt, I won't see it. But I appreciate your point, and I think civility is the most important thing in the conduct of the Legislature.

One of the things we're seeing is that there appears to be a high level of cynicism and distrust in the political system and in politicians—

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I get you to wrap up?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: —and it's interesting because it happens at the same time that we have a more educated electorate than ever.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I do want to thank you, Professor Wiseman, for coming in today. You really have given what you have presented today a great deal of thought, so I sincerely thank you.

When you talk about civility, certainly from the government's point of view this is one of the things that we hoped, quite frankly, would have a great deal of discussion.

One of the things that I know we've talked about is private members' business and what we can do to ensure that it continues to be at the forefront for backbenchers. It's a very important bill when a private member's bill comes forward. It's listening to your communities.

One of the things that I'm sure you have come across in the reading material that you have certainly gone through is co-sponsorship, when we talk about civility and what we can do to have all parties work together more. Do you feel that by co-sponsoring private members' bills, that might be one way of overcoming some of the differences that we have through partisanship?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: That's an interesting point. I think that's for you to decide. I'm not a good enough or close enough observer of private members' bills, and I didn't pick up much debate on it. Somebody like Graham White probably would be in a better position.

But I'll tell you what did strike me as I read that. Also in my office was lying around—the Liberal Party in 2003 issued something called a new Democratic Charter for Ontario. It claimed that the Liberals, if they got elected, which they did, would transform the way politics in Ontario works by “restoring power to the people”—I'm quoting. It promised, in the words of the current Premier, to take power away from backroom people and ensure people's elected representatives are more than just puppets for political parties. It said that elected representatives need more clout. It also promised a law requiring cabinet ministers and the Premier to attend two thirds of question periods in any legislative session or have their salaries docked. It said that the government

MPPs who were not cabinet ministers would be free, with some exceptions, to vote against government legislation.

This made me wonder, has this actually been the practice?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm pleased to tell you that it is the practice, and what we're talking about is going further with the democratic process. That's what this review is about. We committed to the review. We are committed to moving forward the democratic process, ensuring that all members have a strong voice. That's what this is about, and that's why my question on the co-sponsorship.

1500

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I get you to keep it short? You've got about 10 seconds.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Well, if you can get co-sponsorship, that speaks very well. But again, I'm not an expert in procedure. Even if the bill passes, isn't it up to the government whether it calls it for a final vote? So if the government doesn't like the bill—you could have the NDP and the Conservatives co-sponsoring the bill—it just dies; or even if it's a Liberal backbencher or three from the three different parties.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Mrs. Witmer.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, Professor Wiseman. You indicated, I think, in your remarks that you had some concern about the manner in which the changes were made, in that the media had access to the information before it was shared with the opposition parties and there was a lack of negotiation. Mrs. Mitchell talked about democracy and that this is what it was all about.

If indeed now we're reviewing these changes, how would you propose that it be done in order that the outcome would indeed represent what we've heard here today and not just the opinion of the government in power? What should happen now?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I don't think it should just be based on what you hear today and August 11 and tomorrow. I read your debate. There were a lot of concerns. The ideal arrangement is for the House leaders to work out a program which suits everyone's agenda. These changes, from what I made out in the debate, are a lot less controversial than what was done in the early 1990s when the NDP made changes and then when your party was in power. So it seemed to me that these kinds of changes, especially with respect to more time for private members' bills, for eliminating most evening sittings, are something there isn't that much difference on. The main sticking point, it seems to me, is question period and—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The time of.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: The time of. Look, the time of question period is a lot less relevant than if the House only meets 40 days of the year as opposed to 150 days of the year, because then there is no question period at all. So how does that make for accountability? I'm not as concerned about the media. I think we become adjusted

to a certain cycle. And I ask you. The changes were made—and I haven't been to the Legislature—on May 1. You sat until June 18, was it? You had a change of schedule, but was it that negative, was it that bad? I can't tell as an observer of and a consumer of news—and I primarily rely on the newspaper—that it makes much difference.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Wiseman, thank you very much for taking your time to come and present to us and for expressing your candid opinions.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Thank you, and best wishes in your deliberations.

CLERK OF THE ASSEMBLY

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The next deputant is Deborah Deller, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. Are the two members of your staff joining you with your presentation, or are they going to answer questions?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): They'll do both. But there are really two components to the presentation. One is the more procedural side and the other is the administrative side, and when we get to that they'll join me at the table in case I miss anything.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. We had allocated 30 minutes for you.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Okay. I am a Clerk, so I am much more accustomed to sitting quietly at the end of the table and listening than I am to participating in the discussions. So I have—so that I don't get off track—prepared some remarks. They are probably more formal than I am usually accustomed to giving. I hope you'll forgive me, but I'm not intending to preach here. What I would like to do, though, is provide some contextual background for both my remarks and I think what these committee deliberations are about.

The standing orders are but one element of what makes up the procedural authority of a Parliament. They're combined with years of precedent and practice, convention, a myriad of constitutional requirements and, finally, reference to authoritative procedural volumes on practice in other jurisdictions. They by and large emanate from and must remain faithful to the principles of parliamentary law and responsible government. It's important for anybody engaged in a review of the standing orders to understand and safeguard those principles underlying the system in order to protect it. For example, if you were to consider altering—not changing the time of but altering—the nature of question period, it's important for you to understand the historical significance that it's an elemental feature of responsible government and that any change made to it should not impact negatively on its effectiveness. However, our parliamentary traditions and the procedures that support them have been adapted over time to best meet the needs of a modern society and then, by extension, the modern member. Here again, question period serves as a good example. In Ontario, over time, question period has evolved fairly dramatically, and the

proceeding as we know it today has really only existed since 1971.

That the standing orders must safeguard the fundamental principles of parliamentary law need not conflict with the notion that they should also include provisions that best suit the members and provide some balance between the rigours of the Legislative Assembly and the considerable additional demands on the members' personal and professional lives.

While I think there are lots of elements of our standing orders that could stand review, I don't think it's surprising that the most recent set of changes focused on the daily schedule of the House and that this has been the source of significant concern. Members already have enormous pressures on their time; Ms. MacLeod has reminded us of that a few times. You race from the House to committee to the riding for events or party functions and then back to the House, all the while trying to squeeze in some personal and family time. Whatever other consequences any changes in the daily schedule have, it is really important that you develop one that is in your own best interests as members.

I have no doubt that when we get to questions today, you'll have some questions for me on how the change in the daily House schedule has impacted on the operations of the Office of the Assembly, and I will share that information with you. However, whatever we or anyone else has to say on the subject needs to be put into some context. At the end of the week, when all of you are back in your ridings attending openings, anniversaries, constituency functions, association meetings and all manner of other events necessary to the job of being a member, most of us will be taking the weekend to unwind. The hours that the House meets must first and foremost work for you, the member. Our job as staff of the Legislative Assembly is to do whatever is required to support the House whenever it meets.

That said, from a dispassionate standpoint I can offer these observations and suggestions for some consideration.

There has been much discussion around the timing of question period. The only common ground that I think I have noted in your discussions is that everyone seems to agree that it probably should have a consistent start time.

The positioning of question period in the morning or in the afternoon is really not something that I can give an opinion on. I'm not privileged to the detail of what is involved in preparing for asking questions or for answering them, and so I'm not in a position to understand whether or not the timing of it has any consequence on its effectiveness. That's a question I think again is best addressed by the members themselves. I would venture to guess that the better prepared both sides are for questions and answers, the better question period will be.

With respect to the balance of the proceedings, whether or not they occur in the morning or in the afternoon you might want to consider reuniting routine proceedings and having them considered within one time period: first, because splitting them up into two separate

parts of the day I think has caused the spotlight to shift away from what I believe are other important aspects of House business, such as the introduction of bills, motions, ministerial statements; and, second, from a purely selfish point of view, putting the routine proceedings all together helps us a lot for a more coherent presiding officer's schedule and it doesn't cause the Speaker to be taking the chair in the middle of a proceeding without any kind of pause or announcement.

To use a word used by my Deputy Clerk, the current schedule, from our point of view at the table, tends to be a little bit "clunky." There's a fair bit of stopping and starting, which interrupts the flow. Assuming routine proceedings continued to be split, that clunkiness might be mitigated somewhat by a more formal pause between one proceeding and an announced commencement of the next by way of bells. One possible consideration, for example, might be to have the morning debate time end 10 or 15 minutes before the start of question period, perhaps having a morning debate from 9 to 10:45, a recess until 11 o'clock, with an 11 o'clock start time for question period. This has the advantage of ensuring a defined start time for question period every day and it allows for the bells to ring to call the members in for question period.

1510

Depending on the need for debate time, you might also consider having the morning meetings scheduled in the same way that night meetings were previously scheduled under the old rules; that is, that the government House leader could schedule them by motion, with proper notice. That way they could be scheduled as required, and we wouldn't find ourselves in the situation of suspending the proceedings when the full time allotment isn't required, as we saw in the run-up to the summer adjournment.

Private members' public business: From our point of view, we think that it's a good thing that there are three, as opposed to two, items of private members' business being considered every week; that's a step forward. My personal opinion is that the entire process for consideration of private members' public business is something that should be the subject of a further review. That private members' bills currently languish in a variety of standing committees is probably not a good thing either, so this committee may want to consider some time down the road taking a look at the whole issue of private members' public business. Some things that they're doing in other jurisdictions are fairly interesting in that regard. For example, some jurisdictions have a committee that looks at private members' bills that have gone through the system and determines which bills should move forward. So there are all kinds of things that you could think about with respect to the consideration of private members' public business.

With respect to the altered requirement in the standing orders from a certain number of days required for some debates to a certain number of hours required, generally I think this has the potential to improve the quality of

debate in the House. It allows for more flexibility for the day's business by allowing the House to move from one item of business to another.

I assume the downside from a whip's point of view is that he or she may have to find members to speak on more than one subject on any given day. But it strikes me that it will lead to a greater need for negotiations between the House leaders, and that might not be a bad thing. I'm still naive enough to think that this may be the beginning of a process whereby the House leaders will arrange for less debate on the more non-contentious issues in favour of longer debate on the contentious ones.

I would like to just say a word about introduction of visitors. I should probably state candidly off the top that I'm not a big fan of visitors other than visiting dignitaries being introduced in the House. There's really no efficient way of doing it. It interrupts the business of the House, members feel pressured into introducing guests whether they want to or not, and there's always a risk that someone who's not introduced is going to get offended or hurt. As an example, the pages, who are 12- and 13-year-old kids, sometimes have a difficult time understanding why a member will stand up on one occasion and introduce the parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters of one page, and that for another page, maybe even on the same day, who has family and guests in the gallery, they don't get introduced. Finally, it can be used—and has been used—by members as a means to making a political statement. That said, if you are to have a proceeding to introduce guests, it needs to have some guideline around it, and I think that's what the provisional standing orders tried to do.

Currently, it's designated to occur right before question period, which I guess is the time of day, arguably, when most guests are in attendance. But I did observe on more than one occasion that introductions were being made for guests who weren't actually in the gallery at the time they were introduced. I hesitate to say this next bit because I'm afraid it might exacerbate the problem, but I suppose a solution to that is having more than one period during the day when guests are introduced. I'm going to leave that hanging.

There has been some discussion among some members, some comments made at the table that some members would prefer to introduce guests themselves rather than have the Speaker do it. The current arrangement at least ensures that it's done at the appropriate time and that the introduction doesn't slide into the realm of the political or get too long.

With respect to the administrative impact of the altered House hours, I just would like to tell you a little bit about what we did. Since the potential for any impact on the ability of the staff of the Office of the Assembly to provide the same standard of service was real, I convened two meetings of the branch directors. The first meeting was held a week before the provisional standing orders came into effect and was intended to identify, anticipate and address any kind of problems that we foresaw as a result of the change in schedule. The second was held

about five weeks after we started with the new schedule to determine what, if any, actual impact there had been.

Let me start by saying that, in general, the addition of the morning meetings has not had serious consequences on the ability of staff to provide the same level of service to the House—and hopefully, you didn't notice a reduction in any service to the House. I should, however, qualify that phrase by saying that we're all cognizant of the fact that the House didn't meet for all of the hours available to it in the spring sitting. The test period was perhaps not as rigorous as it might have been, and the resulting evaluation of our service provision should take that into consideration.

I'm going to ask Arleigh and Peggy to come up. I'm going to briefly summarize the findings of those meetings, because there were more branches involved than just Hansard and broadcast and recording. They'll go into some more detail or pick up the pieces where I've left them out and be happy to answer questions for you as well.

With respect to Hansard, while we anticipated that there might be a delay in service—and that's primarily because formerly what we were looking at for a daytime sitting was a volume that consisted of about 4.5 hours of speaking time and then maybe an additional 2.75 hours in the evening, but we didn't publish that for the next morning. Now what we were looking at with the current schedule was about eight hours that had to be published for first thing the next morning. So we anticipated that there might be some delay in when we could actually provide Hansard in hard copy and up on the Internet. That didn't happen, but again, there were a number of early adjournments, and obviously that had an impact on that service.

At this time, we don't anticipate any kind of need for additional resources. We have been posting the drafts of Hansard within one hour of the spoken word, although that doesn't occur in the morning up to 11 o'clock, because question period obviously impacts the ability of Hansard reporters to get that work done. However, there was only a very slight delay in posting, and I don't think we received any calls from any member about the Hansard not being posted on the Internet in time. I will say that the provision of laptops for the Hansard reporters in the chamber helped us a lot with maintaining the delivery standard.

We have had to do a staggered shift, which may seem kind of odd. The House is not sitting at night anymore, and it may seem odd that we need to do a staggered shift, but in fact from before 9 o'clock until after 5:45 every day is obviously longer than an 8.25-hour day. The staff is there in the morning, and we also need to have the staff there at the end of the day, so in order to do that we've created staggered shifts. That's a little bit difficult for everybody to get used to, but I think that, by and large, it's been accepted well.

The one issue that we had and that we still are unsure of is that with so many committees sitting concurrently with the House now, there's already a delay, you may

have noticed, in us producing committee transcripts, and we're concerned that that delay may get considerably longer if that continues.

Broadcast and recording has seen a greater reliance on freelancers. One reason for that, aside from the longer daytime hour, is that we used to be able to use Ryerson students as backup. They're in class during the day, so we can't take advantage of that anymore.

There will obviously be no live committee broadcast, because committees are only broadcast live if the House is not in session, and now they most often sit concurrently with the House.

Monday morning has always been a good time for broadcast and recording to deal with any kind of technical bugs in the system, and losing that is potentially a problem. We didn't experience any difficulties in the spring sitting, but that's because there were no technical glitches. I should tell you that, with both the sound system and now with the laptops, if there are mechanical or technical issues that occur in the House, because the House is now sitting from 9 o'clock to 5:45, it leaves very little time for us to iron those out.

1520

Interparliamentary and public relations: The pages programming has had to be adjusted, and it has impacted on the amount of time we can devote to their schooling.

We use university students for ushers, as you know, in the House. Obviously we use them in the evening most often, so it impacts on that program. Next time around, if these hours continue, we'll probably hire a few less of them. I should mention, while I'm on the subject of IPRB, that we have had some concerns raised by some of the schools that access to the chamber floor is no longer an option for school tours coming in.

Committees and journals essentially have managed with the new schedule with not much impact. Research service in the legislative library anticipated a problem in trying to assist with whatever members' requirements were getting ready for question period. To date, that has not been an issue. The press clippings service has tried to get the press clippings out a little earlier for members, and you may have noticed that they were on your doorstep a little earlier. They did that by scrimping and saving every second and every minute. The other thing you may have noticed is that the clippings may not look quite as good as they once did, because they used to spend a bit of time making sure that the articles were straight on the page; they're now not—not a big issue. We have also adapted by allocating extra staff to the clippings from the circulation department.

There has been no impact on security. There is no impact on precinct properties except if there is a seating plan change. Obviously, we pride ourselves on being able to get that on the members' desks before the House is in session. That may not be possible.

The other thing is that with all the construction going on around the building we did experience a lot more stop-work requests than we did before because the noise was interrupting committees and the House. Before, at

least, we used to have the morning when they could do that.

Foodservices' business has just shifted from very busy lunch hours. They're trying to adapt to that. They wanted me to convey apologies if any of you were down in the dining room for that one-hour lunchtime on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. They're just having a little trouble getting used to that volume of people for that short a time.

Overall, there are the usual difficulties that I'm sure you're all experiencing with scheduling meetings, trying to juggle that between the hours the House sits. We will have some increased costs for overtime and freelancers; I don't think they will be significant, though. There is some adjustment to work hours that staff are making.

I think that's just about it for administrative impact. Did I miss anything?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Any comments from the other deputants?

Mr. Arleigh Holder: The only thing I would like to add is that the Monday morning starts actually could be a problem. It's not a problem now, but this is an old building, there's lots of construction going on and a lot of contractors working on the weekends. Sometimes when we come in on the Monday morning there might be a cable accidentally cut. We used to have that time to fix or troubleshoot anything, but now, even when we start at 7:30 in the morning, which is the time we start now, on Monday mornings it could be a problem. If I had a choice, I would like to see that Monday morning start maybe at 10 or something.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions? Mrs. Mitchell.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for all of the hard work that you do on behalf of the people of Ontario. It sincerely is appreciated. Thank you for coming forward today as well.

This is one of the things I had hoped we could talk about, and I welcome your comments on this, Deb. My federal counterpart has a bit different schedule to work with than I do. I can tell you, representing a very large, rural riding, when he does four weeks on, one week off, it really does give the opportunity to get out into your constituency on a much more regular basis, especially with large ridings. I really would appreciate, Deb, if you would give me some comments. What would that do? How would that be helpful, if that is something that would come forward: four weeks on, one week off, say, or three weeks on, one week off, or whatever, but the legislative schedule reflective of that?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): In terms of the response of the assembly and our ability to provide service to the House, I'm not sure, again, that it would make a lot of difference. It may help you as members in terms of dealing with the issues that are coming up in the ridings.

The other thing that I will say is this: I've heard a lot of—you know, members come and sit in that fourth chair at the table, and we chat a lot. There are a lot of mem-

bers, especially when you get to the end of June, for example, who have an awful lot of things going on in their ridings in terms of graduations and that kind of stuff that happens at that time of year. A four-weeks-on, one-week-off type of arrangement probably could assist with that because you could adjust the time of the sitting calendar, perhaps start a little earlier than we currently do in September, perhaps finish a little earlier in the spring. You may want to take advantage of sitting—you would have to if you had four weeks on, one week off—in February.

One thing I would say is that likely with the holidays and so on—and it's the same thing in the federal House—it's not a true four-weeks-on, one-week-off arrangement. It's as close as you can get, taking into consideration things like Easter and Thanksgiving. But, yes, I think it's something worth looking at. We've in fact already spent some time working out some possibilities.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It would be beneficial to the staff, though, would it not, Deb?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I can't say that it would make a difference to staff one way or another.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Okay, thanks.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: We have one more.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. Ms. Broten.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: If I can just pick up on what Mrs. Mitchell was asking, I would put it to you that if you knew that there was a week a month where you could heavily schedule construction, could you not, because none of us would be here? That would be beneficial.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): It could be. With respect to construction, I'm not sure it would make a huge difference, because construction has to be scheduled over a period of time. To say you can start, have a week, and then you have to stop for four isn't something that's practical.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: What about helping Hansard catch up with the delay on committee transcripts?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes, for sure, that's a possibility, depending on whether or not you're going to have committee meetings scheduled for that week off.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My goodness, we would hope not. We want to be in our ridings.

My question that I wanted to ask was with respect to access to the chamber floor. What would need to be changed to allow students to have access to the chamber floor during the Tuesday and Wednesday timeslot when we're not there for the three hours in any event? Why could we not allow school tours on the floor at that period of time?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Effectively, the House is in session, and when the House is in session, there can be no strangers on the floor of the House.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: So what would we have to do to accommodate school tours, to allow them to access the floor during that period of time?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I think you'd want to think about it first, but essentially, if there was a motion in the House to that effect, we would abide by the terms of the motion.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Welcome, Madam Clerk. It is a real pleasure to have you here today along with your staff, and I want to thank you for all that you've done. I want to thank you for the recognition of the fact that myself and my colleagues opposite and in all parties do work all weekend, and that the schedule must work for us and our families and the people we represent.

You made some interesting points, and one I must agree with is the introduction of guests. I must say, as probably the newest member here, it was shocking to me when I first sat here and there were introductions from the floor. I think that would be something that I would encourage the committee members to do away with and have a real recommendation on.

I want to talk a bit about us not debating all of the hours proposed since we have brought in these new standing order changes. I believe you spoke a little bit about it. You also made an interesting recommendation, I believe, in terms of morning sittings being dealt with the way we previously dealt with evening sittings.

I would just like you to talk a little bit more about that, because I do think that's quite interesting. There have been many a day where we adjourned at 2:30 or 3 o'clock and we have lost three and a half hours, and this place is like a ghost town. I'm not sure that's actually doing much for democracy. Would you like to expand on that?

1530

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Moderately. I have a feeling that part of what occurred with respect to us adjourning early is that under the new schedule, you've got more House time than you did previously, because if you didn't need to sit at night, you didn't. Under the new schedule, there are fixed hours. The House had to come into session at 9 o'clock every day. In other words, what you were previously doing by virtue of not sitting at night, you are now making up for by adjourning early, either in the morning, in the afternoon or both. I think that's really what happened with that. It may have also been that there was a remarkable cooperation between parties in this last spring sitting, so some of the debates didn't last as long as they might have under different circumstances. I think there are all kinds of reasons why the House didn't use all of the time allotted to it. I suggest that one thing you may consider is having morning sittings the same as night sittings were previously, by way of a motion. That does allow you, then, the flexibility of scheduling them when necessary and not, if you don't need them.

A lot has been made of the Monday morning House sitting time and the difficulty, especially for out-of-town members, with being here for that. We have some issues with Monday morning in terms of the technical side. I think it would help with that, because you would only need, then, scheduled Monday morning sittings, if required.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to just applaud you on the recognition that Monday morning is difficult not only for your staff but for members from out of town as well in terms of bus schedules, train schedules; from my riding, it doesn't get me in until 10:16, and I frequently do drive with my family. I wanted to thank you for that. I also wanted to thank you for the recognition that private members' business needs to be addressed more in terms of a process and also its timing.

My colleague the House leader from the official opposition also has a question.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I know that the changes have certainly created changes for you, and I appreciate the professionalism and the manner in which you've adapted to the new changes. You mentioned something about the need to reunite routine proceedings. I think it's something that we've spoken to, and I've heard other people talk about how currently it doesn't seem very coherent. There seems to be a sense of disorganization at times, and it's somewhat chaotic as well. If we were going to reunite the routine proceedings, how would you suggest that that happen? Would that necessitate, for example, a 1 o'clock question period start? How would you achieve that?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I don't think that it would require that they occur either in the morning or the afternoon, specifically; I think they could occur in either the morning or the afternoon. For example, you could have the routine proceedings take place in the morning starting at 10, for example, with question period leading.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: At 10 o'clock.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): That's right, or 10:30. In the spring sitting, routine proceedings took less than half an hour on most days. You could conceivably do it from 10 o'clock or 10:30. If you want the definite start time for question period, then it would have to back up to 10 o'clock or 10:30.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: So it could happen in that way—

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Last question.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: —and I don't disagree with you. That would certainly work, if we could do it in the morning. You could do it any time of day as long as you just united those routine proceedings.

Thank you very much, and we do appreciate again the professionalism that you and your staff have shown in making the changes that were asked for.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you, Ms. Deller, and to your colleagues. You've ignited—I think it was Bob Geldof and the Boomtown Rats: I Don't Like Mondays—that old song in my head. It's going to be running

on my hard drive at 11:30 this evening. I think I got the song right; didn't I, Ms. Broten? I Don't Like Mondays, Bob Geldof and the Boomtown Rats? You remember.

You responded to Ms. Broten's question about how you get not just school kids but any visitors access to the floor. I know it's a delightful thing for most people. During the summer break, for instance, when I'm here, it's an opportunity you have to put them right in the circle there and it's an exciting thing. I wasn't really reading your mind, but I was picking up some messaging about the caution that we have to use when we start dismantling not just tradition but precedent. It serves a function, in many cases, so we have to be very careful what we wish for. Maybe without addressing that specific issue, or maybe by using that specific issue—did I read the message right?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The House is in session—members have documents on their desks; the mace is not secured—and it has the ability to come back whenever. The stanchions aren't up, there is no definition of where—I'll use the colloquial term—strangers can go in the chamber. I think it's not unlike when you're having a meeting, for example, in a room like this, and everybody gets up to go for lunch, but you don't want to have to take everything with you, so you lock the door behind you. It's not open for everyone to have access to. I think you really want to be careful to preserve the chamber as a meeting room for the purpose of the House to convene when it is in session.

Unlike many other jurisdictions, we have been lucky to allow members of the public on to the floor when the House is not in session, but I would consider carefully doing that in other circumstances. What we have done is when the House is in recess, we have been doing the tours from the public gallery. So it's not as if during those times we haven't taken them into the chamber at all, we've just been doing it from the gallery.

Interjection: What about Fridays?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Fridays, still on to the floor.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Similarly, Professor Wiseman expressed his dismay at being told to put away a notepad and pen when he was in the visitors' gallery. As I say, both Ms. Broten and I have shared the same sort of questioning about why that would be considered inappropriate. At the same time, though—and there is historical rationale for it, I suppose—just as I wish there were rules against having BlackBerries even in the House, because you've got people focussing on their BlackBerry and reading Lord knows what, the utilization of note-taking in the visitors' gallery could be problematic in and of itself, if you've got people up there reading books, people up there with huge 8.5 by 11 pads, with little reporters' notepads. It can be problematic. So another thing we should be careful what we wish for?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I do. I think you need to probably try not to create any kind of disruption or distraction beyond what you already have when the House is sitting.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The BlackBerries in the House, not only do they get picked up on the microphones, but it just boggles the mind that people pay little enough attention as it is, and there's yet another distraction. If there were assurances that this was bona fide House-relevant stuff or relevant to what's happening in the House at that very moment, you might feel a little more comfortable about it. You talked about detracting from the public's confidence in what we do in that chamber, when the public sees us—and I don't use a BlackBerry, but when people are flicking around with their BlackBerries, people really wonder what the heck we're doing in there.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I'm old school enough to think that the chamber is a debating forum and inasmuch as is possible, members should preserve it as that. So yes, I agree with you.

1540

Mr. Peter Kormos: She's nowhere near as old as I am.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Members of the committee, we had set aside 30 minutes for the Clerk of the Assembly, plus time for the other members of staff. I'm open to it if you want to continue questioning. Give me some directions, and I'll just split the time, or if you're all happy with what you've heard so far, we can adjourn.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I just have a request. We talked about the hours that we were scheduled to meet and didn't meet. Could we have that information as to how many hours we didn't meet when we were scheduled to meet?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm sorry; I didn't get the question.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: During the spring session there were often times in the morning and later in the afternoon when the House was scheduled to meet to debate but the debate ended early. I'm just wondering, in the course of each day how much time was accumulated over the entire time period that we were scheduled to debate—we know the hours that we were trying to achieve—and the number of hours that we didn't debate because we collapsed early.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I have to ask about the importance of that because essentially the collapsing of debate is an all-party decision. Any party that stood and continued the debate could force it right through until 6 o'clock. What is the relevance of having that information? I'm just wondering why we would—because it is a mutual decision among all parties. At some point everyone decided to let the debate collapse.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think it's relevant. It's been requested. She can still ask for it.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: To what purpose?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This is a classic example, Mr. Chair, of things I've confronted in previous committees with the government, where they believe that we in the opposition should not have the right to ask questions. The

rules are here in this place to respect our request for more information.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod, let me preside over this.

Ms. Van Bommel has asked the purpose of it. Mrs. Witmer has requested it. I don't see a problem in it being requested. I'm just going to check with our research people when it can be made available. Obviously we have had some of the material provided to us, but this is further clarification of what you were looking for.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Yes. I think we were all agreed—I think I can speak for Peter, but if not, he'll speak for himself—that we all recognize the desire to sit longer hours in order to have more debate. At the end of the day, I would like to see the number of hours that we actually did sit but also find out how many hours we were scheduled to sit and we actually didn't debate. I just think it's an interesting point of information at a time when we're looking to possibly make changes to the standing orders. It's just some additional information that I think we can use in our decision-making.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Dare I even attempt to be peacemaker here? I think not. We all know that in a hostile House, a hostile chamber, the minimum becomes the maximum, the maximum becomes the minimum. Evening sittings have been used to try to punish the opposition into collapsing debate—that's the reality. Yet the government members find them no less useful than opposition members in terms of sitting in the evening, although some of us—I have no family, I have no friends—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, yes, it's true: I have no obligations other than what I do here and out of my constituency office.

This illustrates the difference between a hostile environment and a collaborative one. I really think that one of the goals, if it can be achieved in this Parliament, should be to develop a more collaborative—not to in any way diminish the opposition. I'll tell you folks what I've had occasion to tell you before, and I'm sorry if you resent me repeating it, but I was here long enough ago when there were no time limits on speeches; when there was no standing order that permitted time allocation, there was only the common-law time allocation; when some debates on bills took two hours and some took 20 days. My recollection of that time—and look, I'd be the first to concede that the first major rule change that I witnessed here was in a very hostile environment. It was done by your friend Mr. Rae, and then—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, the second one was done—you know, the so-called Baird standing order changes. They were unhealthy things. The climate in this assembly has transformed enormously in the brief 20 years that I've been here. I truly believe—and one of the reasons why I don't condemn the additional hours is because it does give us more flexibility to arrange debate time, and it does raise the prospect of saying, "Okay, on Wednesday or Thursday, more likely, or Monday, we'll need two

more hours of debate on Bill 12, but then we can move on to Bill 47.”

The New Democrats have tried to demonstrate our eagerness to have this place work a little more effectively by virtue of signalling—not just signalling, but by telling—the government House leader where we stand with various bills. There are some bills where only the critic—and sometimes the critic doesn’t even want to stand up and speak for a full hour. There are other bills where three members of the NDP will want to speak, and there are some bills where perhaps all nine or 10 members of the NDP are going to want to speak.

Trust me, my friends, I was here in the Peterson government; the House was no less testy. There was some really controversial stuff that came through that government. It was after the accord and it was a huge majority government, so the Peterson government was feeling its oats. So there was some very contentious stuff and some very heated debates, but through all that there was still an ability to organize the House calendar and, yes, have occasion to have days when you could move on to another bill.

The problem in the last five weeks since the standing order changes were implemented is that the government didn’t have, quite frankly, that much left on its plate, so it was a little more difficult to plug in the holes and to organize the sort of thing that I am talking about.

All I can tell you is that I am eager, as the NDP House leader, to develop an environment, a climate, wherein the House will be no less controversial or adversarial but where we can agree that X number of hours will be good for some bills, where 10 times that will be needed for other bills. That’s how this place could become far more effective and, quite frankly, far more family-friendly, because people could plan their lives around their specific obligations, around their critic areas, around when they know they have to be in the House, in the chamber, to take part in a debate.

So I think that information that’s being requested could be valuable because it could show us what time there was available. It was close to the end of that session; the government didn’t have that much left on its plate. We know that. Let’s not kid ourselves, let’s not try to BS our way out of that. But at the beginning of a session with a stronger agenda, the ability to have flexibility and to plan those things can be critical. As I say, that, in and of itself, is far more family-friendly than any standing order changes.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I’m very pleased to hear that the member supports such a collaborative working environment, so I know that when we talk about co-sponsorship, that will be something that will be given due consideration for the betterment of the civility in the House. Thank you, Peter.

I wanted to know exactly when the hearing draft transcripts would be available from Hansard.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): From today’s meeting?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: From today’s, yes.

Interjections.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I’m just asking when, yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Does Peggy know? Two?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Two days.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Two days?

Ms. Peggy Brooks: The draft will be ready probably by the end of today.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. I have one, two, three more people requesting to make comments, but I just want to go back to Mrs. Witmer.

The report of the subcommittee, if you could clarify it for me so I could get staff to—number 10 basically had the number of hours, and I know what you’re looking for. You’re looking for the number of hours that were available versus what were used—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: That’s right.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): —but on a daily basis, or as a lump sum for the whole five-week session?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: No, I’d like it on a daily basis.

Mr. Peter Sibenik: Is it just since the provisional standing orders?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Yes, since then, because there’s been some talk about maybe not sitting or doing things on Monday morning, and it’s just interesting information as you’re trying to make your decisions.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Members of committee, Mrs. Witmer did request this during our subcommittee meeting. I think there’s maybe a misunderstanding or a miscommunication in point number 10 of the subcommittee report. I would rule that her request be brought back. Staff tells me they can make it for our August meeting; it cannot be done for tomorrow. If that satisfies your requirement, I’m just wondering if the other four people still want to ask their questions.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Just very quickly, Deb, and you can get back to us: In terms of the entire standing orders, of the flaws that we are dealing with, could you get back to us with the three biggest flaws or three specific flaws you think that we can deal with right away in terms of the legislation, three solid recommendations on how to move forward?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): First of all, I’m not sure I’d characterize them as flaws necessarily, but are you talking about the provisional standing orders or standing orders as—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The provisional standing orders.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I can see what I can do.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you. Prior to report writing.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Just for a point of clarification, Mr. Chairman: With reference to number 10, is it the member’s concern that that was the information that you were looking for from the original subcommittee? So it’s an alteration of number 10 that you wanted, the numbers

of hours of debate available? Just looking for clarification.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's the same question, basically.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yes. I'm just looking for clarification. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That will be available to us at the August meeting. With that, the meeting is adjourned.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, tomorrow are we only hearing from the Speaker?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): As far as I understand, that's all. There's nobody else.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): His presentation was 20 minutes.

Thank you all very much. Meeting adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1550.

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