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**Official Report  
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(Hansard)**

**Wednesday 30 July 2008**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Mercredi 30 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 ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE  
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 30 July 2008

Mercredi 30 juillet 2008

*The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.*

**REVIEW OF PROVISIONAL  
STANDING ORDERS**

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

**THE SPEAKER**

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Our first deputant is the Honourable Steve Peters, the Speaker of the Legislature. Good morning, Steve, and welcome.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. I hope everyone's having a good summer. I can attest to the fact that when Speakers go on trips and people call them "junkets," they're not necessarily junkets. I took my niece and nephew on one of my trips and returned from Halifax, and my niece said to me, "Jeez, Uncle Steve, we haven't seen you. It's 5:30 on a Saturday afternoon; you've been in meetings all day." I just throw that out.

Just before I start, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that I relay a piece of information to you. As you know, the Speaker, as you and others did, reviewed the use of the Lord's Prayer. At the time, I was asked a question as to whether or not the Speaker would rule on additional prayers. I said that no, I didn't feel that was appropriate. I have referred those additional requests—and they are coming in—to your committee. I will allow you the opportunity to deal with future requests for new prayers. I just thought that it was important for you, as the Chairman of this committee, to be aware.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** We'll send everyone to training.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I've got a number of points that I'd like to raise today. First I'm going to speak as a member, as one of the 107 members in this Legislature. My first comment would be, as far as the hours are concerned, that in the past I could leave my riding on a Monday morning and come to Queen's Park. With this change that has taken place, I have to come in Sunday nights; there's no way around that. So I end up losing a half day of potential constitu-

ency work. I have a rural riding; I have 11 municipalities in my riding, and events that I would have done on a Sunday I now cannot do because I have to be prepared to make the drive into Toronto. From that perspective, I don't like the Monday morning sittings. Also, it can make for a late evening getting home on Thursday nights as well, where historically I may have been able to race home and do events on a Thursday night. Maybe not from a family-friendly perspective, but from a constituency-friendly perspective, my constituents are missing out on some things that I would be at.

I'll start on a few things that I know are issues.

Introduction of visitors: I recognize that the question is whether the Speaker or individual members should do it. I personally believe that we need to maintain a set time for the introduction of visitors. If you go back and review Hansard, you can see that there would be interruptions all through the day of members getting up and wanting to introduce guests. I believe that it maintains consistency. It depoliticizes; I can tell you that as it stands right now, I receive a written request from members of all parties wanting me to introduce guests. Some of those requests that come in are very political, that this person is representing this group and this agency and they are here because of that. I don't politicize them. I introduce the visitors with just a short synopsis of the organization and welcome them on behalf of the member. I believe that if you start allowing individual members, it could politicize the process. I do think that it's important to keep it consistent and keep it at a set time, and that the Speaker, in my opinion, can help to move that along and not allow it to drag on.

The question of question period in the morning: I'm not in a position to comment one way or the other. I am a servant of the House and I respect that, and I will do as the House directs me when it comes to question period. I do think, though, that it's important—I know that the committee has received a letter from the Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario. I would certainly encourage the members to read that letter and take into account the impacts that it does have on staff.

I'm quoting, Mr. Chair, from their letter: "Many of our members in the Ontario public service research, write, edit and/or coordinate the preparation of briefing notes and other material for the use of their ministers during question period...."

“The change in question period has had an impact, however, on the work/life balance of our members, many of whom have had to alter their hours of work to accommodate the change, inasmuch as briefing material is now required by ministers’ offices much earlier in the day than before....

“We are concerned, however, that while employees were able and willing to make adjustments for what was essentially a two-month trial” period ... “the changes are not sustainable on an ongoing, permanent basis, particularly over a longer session that might be characterized by more contentious issues and more legislation than in the last months of the previous session.”

I end with this, and I’m quoting again: “It would be unfortunate if a plan to make the Legislature more family-friendly for MPPs ended up impairing the personal and family lives of public servants.”

I would encourage the committee to take that under consideration.

Having served in two ministries, I very well remember my issues staff coming back from the morning issues meeting. They would then meet with the bureaucracy, the AMAPCEO representatives, and they would spend a good part of the morning researching and ensuring that I was prepared to come into question period for 1:30. There were days it was even a challenge to have a well-researched answer in preparation for question period. So I just urge the committee to take the concerns of AMAPCEO under advisement.

I would say two other things on question period in the morning. Whenever question period is, it should have a set start time, even if that meant, whenever question period was in the day, that there was a recess and it started at a precise time. My experience has been that there have been some days where we were, boom, ready to go for question period at 10:45. There were other sessions when, because of a speaker wanting to finish his or her comments on the debate from the morning, question period was a little later starting. I think it’s important to have a set start time.

I will just make another observation on the morning question period. As Speaker, I not only watch the members, observe them, listen for comments etc., but I also watch the galleries. I’m confident in saying that the galleries do not appear to have the same numbers of public visitors in them as they did in the afternoon sessions. You can take that for what it is, however you choose to.

I understand as well that the committee is considering four weeks on, one week off the calendar. Certainly, again, if it is the desire of the committee and the House to proceed in that—personally, as a member, I think it’s a good idea. I watch our federal colleagues. I think their routine may be three weeks on and one week off, but I could be corrected. I’m jealous at times of my federal member, that he has a lot of time that he can spend in the riding, for a whole week. I think it’s definitely worth pursuing, and it may actually help us in some ways, help Hansard in dealing with some of the backlogs that may exist there.

Presiding officers’ schedule: I think it’s important for the committee to understand that I, along with four other members, serve as your Speaker. It can make for a very long day for the presiding officers as well. You may want to actually query them individually, but I think there are some challenges. The presiding officers’ schedule is an example. For me, I end up every day having to be in the chair three different times. I am there for the procession at 9 a.m. in the morning and lead the assembly in prayers; then I leave the chair; then I return again at 10:45 for question period, stay in the chair until question period has ended and petitions are completed; and then would return, again, in the afternoon for routine proceedings. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays it’s not as much of a challenge because you’ve got three hours, but on Mondays and Thursdays I can be leaving the chair at almost 12:15, at times, and then having to turn around and be back in the House at 1 o’clock. So Mondays and Thursdays can be a bit of a challenge for the Speaker. As I say, it’s three different times that I end up sitting in the chair.

#### 0910

As well, I have a regular meeting that takes place with the presiding officers. The changes of putting business and question period in the morning have certainly impacted on my meeting schedule with them; I would have to say it’s impacted on my overall meeting schedule. I’m finding I’m doing more early morning meetings and later in the day meetings to work around the House schedule.

As well, as far as the routine proceedings, I would encourage that consideration be given to having question period and routine proceedings reunited. One of the reasons I would say that is that routine proceedings are in the afternoon. If the government introduces a bill in the afternoon, the opposition has no opportunity to question and get on the record on that bill until the next day. So I think, again, representing all members of the House, there should be consideration given to going back similar to the way that it was, where we had routine proceedings, where bills would be introduced, ministerial statements, and then we’d go into question period. That, I believe, would give the opposition a better chance to be on the record that day if a particularly contentious bill is introduced. Right now, they don’t have that opportunity.

On the whole issue of co-sponsorship of bills, I would just encourage you, if you’re going down that road, to make sure that it’s well thought out. Issues that you may want to consider: Can sponsors withdraw their name at any point? As an example, if an amendment makes the bill unacceptable for one of the co-sponsors, what’s the status of the bill? A resolution process where there’s disagreement as to the disposition of the bill, i.e. which committee it’s going to go to. It sounds American to me, but I’ll leave it at that.

Another issue, I understand, is allowing tours on the floor when the House is in recess. I, along with the Clerk’s office, do not believe that would be a good idea. I will say that this has been one of the things that has been lost in this process, where the public had that opportunity to tour the Legislature in the day and be right on the

floor. That has been lost. We have security procedures that are in place that have to be taken into consideration for the protection of all members and all staff. Just because the House is in recess, we can't suddenly swing the doors open and allow the public in, because then they'd have to come through and do their security sweeps again. So really, logistically, it cannot work. I would say that public access to the floor is something that has been lost.

Some of the other issues that I just wanted to raise as observations: Certainly we all recognize that there are a lot of receptions that take place here at Queen's Park, groups that are coming here to lobby members, to provide information for members. I would encourage the committee to survey those groups and organizations that have had receptions during the two-month trial period, especially those groups that have been here in previous times, and look at their turnout in the past two months compared to previous years. My gut tells me that those groups will tell you that they have lost contact with members as a result of this. Again, I think we need to think not only about ourselves but certainly about staff, some of these outside organizations and the receptions.

I know you questioned the Clerk extensively and she spoke to the issue of staff impact. I did read in excerpts from the AMAPCEO letter, but I think it's important to understand that this Legislature has yet to experience, even in the two-month trial period, a full day running. Many days, the House has risen early, so it is difficult to gauge the true impact on staff when the House would be sitting from 9 a.m. until 5:45 p.m. I don't think we've been able to properly understand some of the issues because we haven't had the full sittings.

Another group that I believe we need to take into consideration are our pages. The page program has been highly successful. I actually had a page, Cali Van Bommel, live with me for her three-week period here. That group of pages experienced the old schedule and the new schedule. I asked Cali afterward, "What did you like better?" She liked the old schedule.

I'll raise some issues, because I think we need to take into consideration the impact that it has on the page program.

Education issues: Students used to receive seven hours of legislative process class per week. The new schedule now only accommodates approximately four and a half hours a week. Most of the educational hours are now spent in two separate groups, making it harder to plan team-building group activities or experience the overall being together as a team.

Lunches: Due to the House schedule, pages never get the full one-hour lunch break on Mondays and Thursdays—just like the Speaker—because the House usually sits past noon. Lunch breaks are not long enough to properly accommodate MPP lunches with pages—and we all have pages with whom we have lunch. The schedules don't properly accommodate that with the pages and ensure that they're back in time for their House duties.

Meetings: Meetings seem to be no longer possible with the Premier and much harder to book with other

party leaders. The hours that the House does not sit on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, when the pages would be available for meetings, are now dedicated to caucus and cabinet meetings.

General issues regarding the hours for the pages: Pages are more tired due to the longer hours. Pages have to arrive in the quarters no later than 8 a.m. each morning. It was one thing for Cali Van Bommel to do the short little walk down to the page room for 8 o'clock, but we do have pages who are coming in—most pages from outside ridings do find accommodation here in Toronto, but there are pages who come in every day from Richmond Hill, Thornhill, Oakville, Oshawa and Whitby, so it makes for a very long day for those individuals. They depart for home between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

I think an issue that needs to be recognized is the uncertainty of the hours of the past session, i.e., that the House frequently rose earlier than scheduled. Most pages' rides were not scheduled to arrive until either 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. So the pages themselves were not able to take advantage of the early departure times that members enjoyed.

I know that there are other family-friendly issues as well. Those issues need to be addressed by the House leaders. I am prepared as Speaker to work with the House leaders on dealing with some of the other family-friendly issues that have arisen around this place, but it's not in my authority—because this was an all-party committee that was struck by the Legislature, it is not for me to suddenly assume the chairmanship of that. But I would say to the committee that if the House leaders can get an agreement, I am prepared to work with all members on dealing with family-friendly issues relating to this building and taking issues, if needed, to the Board of Internal Economy.

I know the member for Nepean–Carleton—there's a letter in my office that I've received from you, and I'll be responding back to you, saying that it is in the hands of the House leaders. As much as I am certainly prepared to work with you and with all members, I don't have the authority to do it, and we may want to speak to that.

Just one other comment that—

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** I'm sorry, Mrs. Mitchell. I didn't hear you.

0920

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell:** You didn't?

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** No. You've been grimacing and chortling through the bulk of the Speaker's presentation.

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell:** I was not, Peter. Don't be ridiculous.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Are you okay, ma'am?

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell:** Peter, your comments yesterday and your comments today reflect your attitude towards members. It's ridiculous.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** No, no, as long as you're okay. Sorry, Speaker.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** It's all right, and I don't mind. As I said at the outset, Mr. Chair, I am but a servant of the House and I will do as the House directs

me to do. But I am one of the members of this Legislature as well, one of the 107 of us. I'm quite comfortable speaking my mind on issues that impact me in my performance and impact me personally as well.

I'll make my final comment, Mr. Chairman, on private members' business. I think it's good too that you're debating that the members get a chance to debate three pieces of private members' business. I would, though, encourage this committee or maybe another committee to take a hard look at private members' business and the relevance of private members' business, because it would be interesting to go back and do a study of the number of private members' bills that have been introduced and how many of them have actually passed over the past 10 years.

I would encourage you, as I spent some time with Speakers from other provinces and territories, to look at some other jurisdictions. Alberta has a wonderful system: Within one month of a private member's bill being introduced, it has been through first, second and third reading, and it's either yea or nay. It passes or it doesn't pass.

Instead of having bills languish and sit in legislative purgatory, I would encourage you to take a look at some other jurisdictions and what they're doing with regard to private members' business. I think it is important that members have that ability to deal with private members' issues. I can say, having been a member here since 1999—so that's through two political stripes—that I've seen lots of good private members' bills that came forward that I believe were non-partisan and were probably in the best interests of the province or particularly in a member's constituency, and they don't go anywhere.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Can I get you to summarize?

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Summarized.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Okay. Thank you very much. The Speaker was allowed 20 minutes.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Oh, sorry. I didn't know that.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Time has run out, but I know many of you have questions so I would say, with the indulgence of the committee, I'll go one or two rounds, whatever you would like. Two? Okay. Mrs. Witmer.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer:** Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Peters. We really do appreciate the objective look that you've taken at what's happening. You obviously have a broader perspective than most of us, and it was interesting to hear the impact on the pages.

We've already raised the issue of the Monday morning session creating hardship for people who do come from out of town and shortening the weekend and family time. We would agree with you that there needs to be a definitive start time for question period, and certainly we agree that the routine proceedings should be united as opposed to the way they are right now. On the receptions, I heard from a couple of people who did think the

attendance was somewhat down because people had left the building long before that, so that may be an issue too.

I want to go back to the hours. We have the AMAPCEO letter, but I think people have not taken a look at some of the labour problems that we as MPPs have. Many people here have only one staff member. If you're not a parliamentary assistant or a cabinet minister, unfortunately our budget doesn't allow for a lot of staff. I can tell you personally that now with this revised day our staff are working from 7:30 to get us ready for question period and must be here until, obviously, 6 o'clock. That is a 10-and-a-half-hour day. If you multiply that by five, these people are now being expected to work 52 and a half hours, as opposed to 37 and a half. If we're going to continue with this schedule, I think we're going to have to take a look at how we can compensate people for the overtime or how we can increase the staffing budget, because it's not fair for these people. I guess too they travel into the downtown. If they're expected to be here at 7:30 and must be here until 6 o'clock, it really reduces the time that they have at home with their families. So I think one thing that the changes have done is to actually make family life and personal time less available to all staff. Do you have any comments on that?

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** My only comment would be that you and I, having both served as labour minister, recognize that the Employment Standards Act does not apply to our staff. My only comment would be that if there was a desire to look at trying to hire any additional staff, as the Chairman of the Board of Internal Economy, if there was a proposal brought forward, I'd certainly make sure that it was fully deliberated at the Board of Internal Economy.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer:** Just going back, you mentioned that we're looking at co-sponsorship of bills. I didn't know we were looking at co-sponsorship of bills but yesterday it was raised by the government, so I guess that's why they've got us here, partly. I didn't know we were looking at three weeks on and one week off or four weeks on and one week off either. I guess at the end of the day, I'm not sure what our deliberations are going to achieve, but certainly I hope that whatever happens there can be some unanimous agreement as a result of the discussion today, tomorrow and on the 11th that all of the parties can support.

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

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Thank you, Speaker. I'm disinclined to put questions to you because you've come here, you've said what you've had to say and I don't want to draw you into what is in many respects a partisan debate. Standing order changes are made by governments to suit their goals and their agenda. I saw that with the Rae standing order changes back in the early 1990s; I saw it with the Tory standing order changes. The government didn't do that to accommodate the opposition; the government did that to advance its own interests and in many respects to put restraint on the opposition, and I understand that. I regretted both of those instances, two of the instances I witnessed here. So as I say, it is a

partisan motivation. When governments do these things, it's partisan. I don't want to see you in any way, shape or form have your non-partisan capacity compromised.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** I appreciate that. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Mr. Ramal.

**Mr. Khalil Ramal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your presentation. I know you covered a lot of points. First, I want to talk about the changes. As a member, when they proposed the changes, I was happy with them. As members and as people, when we get used to certain patterns and ways—I guess psychologically we try to oppose it for many different reasons, because we've established some kind of network and time frames and we work around them for many years. So when we experience change—particularly myself, I liked it. I found myself with a lot of time and I was able to do a lot of duties as a PA for my ministry. Also, I got a lot of chance for lunchtime and I got a lot of time to connect with my constituents from my office. I understand about the pages, and you mentioned lunchtime. I think we have more lunchtime now than before. We have a lot of break time from 12 to sometimes 3 o'clock. It's sometimes three hours to do whatever we can.

Also, you mentioned introducing people. We spoke in detail about it yesterday. We used to, as you know, stand up and introduce our guests, sometimes friends, sometimes family, sometimes people we know, to get the credit and our name appearing in Hansard. I understand your concern. It used to be all over the map and sometimes it interrupted the whole procedure of the House. But what do you think if we—this is a question, of course; hopefully you can answer after I finish my points—have a fixed time, like five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the afternoon sessions, and we allow the members to introduce their guests? Then they have a personal touch, instead of going by you, because most of the time, Mr. Speaker, you introduce people who are not in the gallery or who have already left. The whole purpose of introductions is already gone.

We talked about receptions. I know many people who come to Queen's Park to lobby members and to meet with various parties to talk about their issues, and they lost touch during the past session because of the time change. Hopefully, when we go next time and they'll know exactly the standing orders, they can fix their times—and I think we have a lot of time.

**0930**

You talked about the pages, and the Clerk yesterday spoke about the ushers. We have two programs: We have the pages in the morning and the ushers at night. Since we're not sitting at night, I wonder if an internal procedure between yourself and the Clerk can be adjusted for the pages in the morning and the ushers. So for this one here you can utilize the capacity of the ushers, because she mentioned yesterday about the ushers maybe being downsized because we're not sitting at night.

You talked about sitting longer hours. I found myself, as a member, that you still come in the morning re-

gardless. Whether we're sitting or not sitting, we have to come here to this place at 8 o'clock in the morning and proceed to do different work. Most of the time, we sit until 9 o'clock, and then we have to come back again at 8 o'clock on the second day. So most of the time we come tired, exhausted, and we're not able to perform as we're supposed to. But these changes allow us to come in the morning and finish by 6 o'clock most of the time, and then we are able to go back home, relax, sit and re-energize ourselves and come back fresh the second day to perform our duties.

I'm going to leave some things to my colleague.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Thank you, Mr. Ramal and Mr. Chair. Just remember, the ushers are university students, so they are in school during the day. Most of them are students at U of T, but not entirely. Many of them are in classes during the day.

Introduction of guests: As I've said with everything that I've done today, if there are changes made to the standing orders or direction given to the Speaker, the Speaker will accommodate. I serve you. To Mr. Ramal's suggestion of maybe looking at a couple of times a day to introduce guests, if that is the desire of the committee, I will do that. But I would throw back to the committee that I don't want to be, as Speaker or as one of my colleagues, policing. If an introduction starts to get politicized and causes an uproar in the House, the onus is going to come back on the Speaker to deal with that. So if that's the desire, to have the members individually introduce the guests, great. But if you're going to be asking the Speaker to decide whether that was too political of an introduction or not, I have a bit of a problem with that. But if that's the desire, I will do as the committee directs.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Thank you. Ms. MacLeod.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Welcome, Speaker. It's nice to see you.

Just a point of clarification: You mentioned a letter that I had sent to the honourable government House leader. It was intended for him; it was a courtesy copy for yourself.

With respect to the four weeks on, one week off and co-sponsorship, it's the first time in the last two days that the official opposition, and I'm sure the third party, has heard of those proposals, so it has us questioning why we're here right now. If we're intending to be here in good faith and learning things from people who are being questioned or people who are providing a deputation, it's a bit ironic for us.

I would like to comment just a bit on the four weeks on, one week off for my colleagues, who have been saying how great the federal members feel about it. Because of the work that I've been doing to try and make this Legislature more family-friendly and by advocating for that, I actually spoke to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs for Canada, Rona Ambrose, about some of the things that we do here. It's not clear to me that the government of Canada or the Parliament of Canada

thinks they've got what they're doing right either. So I would encourage members here to do what Deborah Deller told us yesterday, to make sure that what we choose here works best for us.

That brings me to my second point about AMAPCEO, the pages and the ushers. I appreciate your bringing forward their points of view, and that's very important. But at the same time, this Legislature needs to work for Ms. Broten, Ms. MacLeod, Mr. Kormos, Mr. Ramal and Mr. Rinaldi. It has to work so that we can best represent our constituents and make sure that we're healthy, happy and wise and not rundown frequently. I think when you're looking at the timetable that we've set up—look, I'll be the first to admit I don't have a problem with the hours. Monday morning is a challenge; I think we need to look at that. It's very difficult for folks like me and from other parts of the province to get in here for 9 o'clock. That said, we should be working right until 6 o'clock, and that hasn't—and you indicated this, and yesterday we learned from the Clerk of the House that we didn't use all of the time that we were given in terms of debate. That's a problem.

You mentioned that we should reunite routine proceedings and question period. I think that's a brilliant idea. The day, as one of the table officers has said, was clunky. We have to really look at that to streamline this whole process.

In terms of introductions, I'd like to say this: If the one thing the federal Parliament does do well is save that use for very important visitors to the gallery—not that all visitors aren't important, but it is for visiting dignitaries. I think that by the way that everybody can be recognized and then some people aren't, and some people in a group might be recognized and others aren't, it creates more problems than I think it's worth for the chamber. It also distracts from why we're actually in the chamber, and that is to debate the ideas of the day and to challenge the government—and in the opposition, it's for us to put forward ideas. We can't lose sight of what we're supposed to do in that chamber.

This process has become more partisan than I think was intended. To find out that this was going to be family-friendly because it was a term that members of the opposition were using, and we find out on a Sunday that we're having these changes rather than learning about them through our House leaders, just because it was a buzzword of the day, I guess—I don't think that's what people have intended in terms of making this place more family-friendly.

Those were my comments, and I wanted to get them on the record.

I do have one request, and that is to receive your timetable for presiding officers for this committee for report writing, and I'm hoping that you will be able to provide that to us.

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

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** No, thank you, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Mrs. Van Bommel.

**Mrs. Maria Van Bommel:** Thank you very much, Speaker, for coming in.

A couple of questions—and right back to Ms. MacLeod's question about presiding officers. You said there's a change in the amount of time that they're spending, and I'm wondering how that has changed from when we used to have evening sittings. You need presiding officers at that time too. I'm not quite sure what has changed in that respect.

When it comes to receptions, definitely. I make an effort to attend because I know these people try hard to put these things together and it is more difficult if they set them up and people aren't attending. But then, also, that could be just as easily changed. The cattlemen's reception at lunchtime with their barbecue was just as well attended this year when the change in the schedule happened as any other year. I guess because I'm kind of a morning person myself anyway, I really like the breakfast-type receptions. Maybe just a different approach that these groups take in order to meet with us would work well. We did one breakfast reception that was very well attended. I've seen them before and I think they work quite well. Maybe we all like to have a glass of wine or a beer at the end of the day, but I don't think that's really the point of a reception; it's to make the contact with the group that's trying to reach us and talk to us about their issues.

You mentioned private members' business, and you talked about Alberta and said that it might be interesting to know the ratio of numbers of private members' bills brought forward and the number passed. But I think if we're going to do that, we also need to have a look at the number of things that were brought up in private members' bills that were brought back either through government bills or through minister's directives and that sort of thing. My own private member's bill on farm stray voltage didn't pass in third reading, but the Minister of Energy took action on it and the Ontario Energy Board is now doing discussion papers. Personally, I don't care if my bill didn't pass. I just wanted the action, and I got the action. So we need to have a look at that too. When we're talking about the stats and how many private members' bills have been successful, we need to look at not only the ones that actually made it through third reading and got royal assent, but also the ones that got further action but never really came through under the name of the person who presented the issue in the first place.

**0940**

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** I will table, Mr. Chair, with the clerk the presiding officers' schedule, past and present, so that you do have that.

Mr. Chairman, on a lot of the issues that I've raised today, my attempt was not opining and offering my opinion. On some of them I did maybe cross a bit of a line, but what I tried to relay today were just observations of sitting on a chair as the Speaker responsible for this building and these grounds. I wouldn't want to leave the impression that "I think you should do this" or "I think you should do that." I'm trying not to opine; I'm trying to just give you observations.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Thank you. Anybody on this side?

Okay. The last person I have is Mrs. Mitchell.

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell:** Just a question, Steve, and I do want to thank you for coming out today and giving your presentation.

With regard to deferred votes, one of the comments made by the press yesterday is that what they're looking for is a time period where votes happen on a regular basis so that they know it's identifiable. They feel that could possibly give them better access to cabinet ministers and the Premier, and that was one of the things they talked about.

If that was to go forward as a recommendation, do you see that it would have the ability to affect some of the concerns you talked about, specifically on Mondays and Thursdays—with regard to your time, Steve, those were specifically your concerns. So if deferred votes—

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Well, I think deferred votes need to remain in the standing orders as part of the routine proceedings, and if we just set a time for those routine proceedings that would be consistent every day, then everybody knows, as is in the standing orders right now—one of the things that, as Speaker, I call for are deferred votes. So if everything is at a set time, then that should satisfy everyone.

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell:** It was just one of the concerns that Mrs. Witmer brought forward as well with regard to how we go forward, looking for more set periods of time and bells and that type of thing so that the press has the ability and more access to the Premier and ministers as well. That was one of the recommendations that they brought forward.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Mr. Speaker, thanks for being here. We really appreciate it.

**The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Have a great day, all.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Members of committee, before we adjourn, I just wondered if you wanted to spend a couple of minutes to request anything so that we can have our final meeting with all the information that you need. Mr. Kormos.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Okay, there, that's it. We're meeting on August 11, as I understand it?

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Yes.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** I think it's important that we have some sort of agenda for August 11. I'm not taking about a time frame or a structure; I mean an agenda. So, here, let me say it on behalf of New Democrats: As I said yesterday, our interest here is in getting question period to a point in time after 12 noon. Our interest here is in eliminating those huge gaps of the day on Tuesdays and Wednesdays—I call them wacky Tuesdays and wacky Wednesdays—because you've got those huge gaps in the middle of the day. I think, and again I don't want to speak for people, there probably is agreement that there should be a fixed time for the commencement of routine proceedings/question period, just on the basis of what people have talked about in terms of the public expectation, the staff's expectations, and the respective critics' and ministers' expectations, and for it to be treated as what we call at various conventions "orders of the day."

Whatever else is going on gets interrupted at that time, and you go, at a fixed time, to routine proceedings/question period.

Quite frankly, that's it. The review, as I understand it, is of the provisional standing orders. House leaders have indicated their willingness to meet on a regular basis with the Speaker and the Speaker has set up a structure for that to take place. And it hasn't commenced yet, but that's okay; we're in a break. House leaders at this point—I speak of course for myself and my caucus, and I speak based on what I observe and hear from Mrs. Witmer and Mr. Bryant—appear to be eager and capable of addressing issues at House leaders' and resolving matters or even making recommendations to the Speaker without there being a need for standing order revisions or standing order changes.

So there it is: The issues are the timing of question period, the gaps in Tuesdays and Wednesdays and the disconnect between routine proceedings, at least insofar as they consist of ministerial statements and responses by respective critics—addressing the disconnect between that and question period. As well, I find very interesting the commentary about introduction of bills succeeding question period such that any bills that are introduced aren't going to be the subject matter of question period. It doesn't always happen; as a matter of fact, it probably happens more rarely than not because first reading is usually not contentious. But as you well know, from time to time it most certainly is.

That's the agenda we are looking for: the discussion around those things. Again, I don't expect the government to necessarily put forward their agenda today, but if we could get it in a reasonable period of time before August 11, it would make August 11 much more effective and productive.

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

**Ms. Laurel C. Broten:** One of the things that I think would be helpful for the committee would be a categorized summary of the information received over the two days, highlighting the issues that matter to all sides of the table. I tried to do a rough draft myself of what I thought those topics were.

Certainly the timing of question period—the pros and cons, what we heard people say, putting that under one heading in a document so that someone can see that; the role of the media; we heard a variety of information about Monday mornings; the technical schedule, what have you, having that together; routine proceedings—together or apart; better delineation of various structures within the day—bells, start times—that type of information categorized; we heard different speakers talk about introduction of guests; conduct in the chamber, civility; co-sponsorship, sort of a category unto itself; and there was some really good advice received on private members' bills and how that might be changed or not.

That type of categorization at least summarizes how information would be received and then can be looked at by the committee on the 11th so that it's in an organized fashion.

Does it sound lawyerly my in approach, maybe, summarizing the evidence?

I think Carol also had some perspectives.

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

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell:** I would hope—if we can have the official transcripts, whether or not it's broken down in the manner that Laurel just spoke to, I think that would certainly make it a much easier read and something that would be better for the members to use.

I'm just going to throw out dates, and then we can talk about that—on the fifth at noon, if that was conceivable, if we could have something in place by then. If the parties could bring forward recommendations by the seventh at noon from that, and then each party make recommendations. Peter, you specifically went over your recommendations, but if we could receive that, that would give us the springboard into the 11th and certainly a much clearer agenda.

0950

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

**Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer:** I think the first thing we need to keep in mind is why we are here, and I think Peter did speak to that. We are here to review the provisional standing orders; we're not here to make other recommendations outside of that. If there are other changes to be made, then I do believe that is the purview of the House leaders, and obviously we're quite capable of making those changes. So I'm a little uncomfortable, because nobody except the government has talked about co-sponsorship of private members' bills. That's not what we're discussing. We're not discussing three weeks on or four weeks on. That's not part of our review. We're reviewing the changes that were made to the standing orders only. If we're going to take a look at some of those other issues, then I believe that is a responsibility of the House leaders. That's not within our mandate.

I would say to you our biggest priority would be the changing of the question period to the afternoon and uniting routine proceedings at that time and having one start time every day as well. I think it's extremely important to us that that would happen.

Of course, we've talked about the problem with the Monday morning. If you take a look at the time that we didn't use in the course of the whole day, you can see that we certainly could forgo the Monday morning session and still, I believe, pass bills.

Those are a few of the priorities that we have that we would be looking for some changes to.

I don't disagree with Laurel. I don't disagree with Carol. I think if you could look through all of the submissions, written and oral, that we received, as they pertain only to the provisional standing orders that we are mandated to review—we're not mandated to go beyond that—I would like to see the same breakdown as to what was said and why, and if you can have it to us by the fifth so we can respond by the seventh for some discussion on the 11th, that's fine with us.

I think the whole issue of private members' bills needs to have a very thorough discussion, and I don't think we can do it here. I don't think that actually is our mandate.

But I like what I heard about Alberta, and maybe the House leaders need to take a look at that, as to how we do that differently in the future.

The reality is, it doesn't matter whether you have co-sponsorship or one person; it's what happens to the bill after you deal with it in the House that makes the difference. Anyway, those are our opinions.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Before I proceed to the next speaker, I'll just remind the committee of the amendment to the standing orders that was done on May 1, 2008. It actually authorizes this committee to "conduct a review of the standing orders during the 2008 summer adjournment"—it does not say to conduct a review of the provisional standing orders—"and to report its opinions, observations and recommendations on the standing orders to the House by the first Thursday following the resumption of the House in the fall, 2008, and (b) provides for a process to extend or permanently adopt the provisional standing orders, and any amendments thereto, no later than the third Thursday following the resumption of the House in the fall, 2008."

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** The standing orders are the provisional standing orders. Those are the standing orders that are in effect. The other standing orders are set aside. They are suspended. The reference to standing orders in that provision of the standing orders—because if that wasn't a standing order it wouldn't have power, it wouldn't have effect. So it's that standing order that gives this committee jurisdiction, and therefore it's the standing orders that are in effect today that this committee is to review, with respect.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** If I could just give you the additional, it says to submit the "opinions, observations and recommendations on the standing orders to the House...."

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Yes.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** So we can submit, in my opinion, and I will turn to the clerk for—

**Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer:** Only the ones that are in effect today.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Yes. We could submit changes to the ones that are in effect today, but we're still entitled to give our opinion, observations and recommendations on anything else, with reference to the standing orders. That would be my interpretation.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** That's your interpretation. I think that's overly broad in terms of what this committee has done in the course of three hours and that it intends to dedicate one day to. We may not be able to get this done on August 11, but we'll see what happens on August 11, won't we?

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** I think we'll find middle ground.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** I admire and respect your optimism.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Okay. Is everybody comfortable with what will be provided to us?

I think Carol has suggested that we get from the clerk's office by August 5, noon, what has transpired in

the last two days. All the parties have until August 7, noon, to submit suggestions, opinions, whatever.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Where does it say that?

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** This is what Ms. Mitchell has suggested.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** It was just a suggestion?

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Yes. I have all your suggestions that the clerk's office—

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Chair, wait a minute. We passed a subcommittee report. Okay?

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Right.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** We passed that yesterday. Let's not change the rules midway here. And I, quite frankly, am not going to stand up and tell the government that they can't raise any new issues if they weren't presented by August 7 or August 6 or August 8.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** I don't think that's what I was saying. You've actually suggested that we have an agenda for the August 11 meeting, and I think what has been agreed by all is that that's a good idea. But to make August 11 work, and so that we all come here

fully informed, we will get a summary of what has taken place—all parties will get it by August 5—and if you have anything that you want to submit for that August 11 meeting, you do it by August 7—

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** But just as with submitting—

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** —after you've read what has been given to you.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** Chair, please. Just as with submitting amendments, this is advisory, not mandatory.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Absolutely.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** It is not restrictive. Please make that clear—

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** Okay.

**Mr. Peter Kormos:** —or else you appear to be heavy-handed, and I know you're not.

**The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon):** No, I'm just trying to move the meeting along.

Okay. So are we all happy with that? Thank you very much. Meeting adjourned.

*The committee adjourned at 0957.*

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