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Wednesday 6 April 2011

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mercredi 6 avril 2011

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Television broadcast system

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Systeme de télédiffusion

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 6 April 2011

Mercredi 6 avril 2011

The committee met at 1305 in room 228.

TELEVISION BROADCAST SYSTEM

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'll call the meeting to order of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. We're here today for our orientation briefing on the television broadcast system of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We have with us the Clerk and the director of broadcast and recording services.

I will turn it over if you have a couple of opening remarks you want to get into, and then we'll move on to the tour, I understand?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes. Since I last talked to you about broadcast and recording, we haven't made a lot of significant changes, so we thought that since there are probably a number of you sitting here who haven't actually had any tour of the inner workings of the broadcast and recording system, we would maybe take a break from this room and take you on a tour of the media studio operations and all of the rest of the broadcast and recording operations.

We can do that first, if you like, and then come back to this.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's all you have for opening remarks? I thought you had more.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I should warn you that one of the elevators is not working, so it may be an exercise tour.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): It's only one floor; come on.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Chair, I just want to ask the Clerk whether she brought a rope for us, so that we can all be together?

Laughter.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes, I have the rope—and a bag of Chips Ahoy! cookies, too.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Oh, fantastic. We can all hold it.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. Does anybody on committee—are we in agreement? Go for the tour, and then we'll come back?

Interjection: Sure, absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay; do we have to get a motion to recess, or no?

Mr. Dickson.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Where is the tour and how long is the tour? I either sprained my ankle or gout has gone to the other side of my body.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Well, it's a tour of the television broadcast system and I believe the media room downstairs, so the first floor and the third floor.

Mr. Arleigh Holder: We're going to start on the first floor, and then we're going to go to the third floor.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): So we could take the elevator. How long would it last?

Mr. Arleigh Holder: About half an hour.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Half an hour, and then we're back here in half an hour.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: We can take you in the chair. We'll just roll it around.

Mr. Joe Dickson: You got a wheelchair?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Well, you're in a wheely chair.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Is everybody going on the tour?

Mr. Michael Prue: Sure.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. So then we'll all come back here, because if we're not all going on the tour, I should pick a time to resume. So we're going on the tour.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Okay. We're recessed?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Yes, we're recessed.

The committee recessed from 1308 to 1353.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll reconvene the meeting. Madam Clerk?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I guess, as we go along, if you have questions as a result of the tour or of anything that Arleigh and I talk about, then just interrupt and we can deal with them as we go.

One of the elements of this committee's mandate is to review the broadcast guidelines. I don't know whether you've been given copies of those.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Yes, they were circulated.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): These guidelines have actually been in place since broadcast and recording was first created and the chamber and room 151 were first televised, in 1986.

The principle behind the guidelines at the time was that the camera shots should really be confined to the member speaking and not be wider shots or shots left to the discretion of camera operators. The feeling then was that it's not so much a television show as just a way of

distributing the proceedings of the House to the wider audience.

I don't know whether you've had an opportunity to go through these, and whether or not there are any concerns you have with the guidelines. Arleigh and I have talked, and we don't have any particular amendments that we would recommend right now to these guidelines.

There is one thing I would like to point out: Number 3 talks about the proceedings in the legislative chamber and the last line talks about, "Proceedings of any standing or select committee may be recorded and broadcast by agreement of the House leaders." In fact, what's happening more frequently is that there are certain committees that move and pass motions to have their proceedings broadcast for certain particular reasons.

An example of that was the committee that did the disabilities act. The committee there wanted to ensure that people in the disabled community had the fullest ability to watch the committee proceedings, so those committee proceedings were broadcast to the public. Now we have an additional committee that is doing the Forestry Act that has also passed a motion to have its proceedings included on the webcast.

In our minds, it doesn't make sense in each and every one of these cases to have to get agreement of the House leaders; in particular, for example, with the forestry committee. That proceeding can easily be accommodated on our webcast with an additional link that says, "committee hearings on such-and-such a bill" at no additional cost.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We have a couple of questions here: Ms. Jones, then Mr. Clark.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: With the two examples that you gave, did it still need to go back to the House leaders for that approval, or was it approved just because it was in the subcommittee meetings?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Because the committee agreed to it, we went ahead and did it. Essentially, if it's in 151, it's broadcast anyway; it's just a question of whether it's broadcast live or not. Because we can do it now without pre-empting the House, it's a different situation than it was in 1986.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Are you suggesting that these guidelines need to be updated, then?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I would just suggest that if you're looking at updating, that might be one you might want to take a look at.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Fair enough. Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: Just to follow up on that, that is the section that I'd like to revisit, section number 3. I was on the general government committee last week and I have to admit that the reason I asked the question was because of the fact that we were reviewing broadcast services this week. It seems to be, when you look at other legislative assemblies, they have the capability of providing streamed video on their committee meetings, and some of them provide audio for podcasts. That's why I asked the question. If we can do a Skype presentation and have a live stream for a committee for one committee meeting, as a

standing committee we should consider to amend 3 so that's provided.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Just a word of caution is that the only committee room that's equipped for televising—

Mr. Steve Clark: Is 151.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): —is 151 and that was done by design in 1986. But you're quite right: We could explore the possibility of doing an audio stream, as you say, as some other jurisdictions do. I guess that's something for this committee to decide: whether they would want committees to determine on a case-by-case basis whether or not they want to be streamed or whether they would want to just have it done as a matter of course.

Mr. Steve Clark: And certainly, when I look at other provinces, there's a whole host and it appears that there are many smaller provinces that provide a lot better audio and video access to their proceedings than we do. Again, if it doesn't cost very much—and obviously even in a committee room like this, an audio feed for a podcast wouldn't be that outrageous. We have the technology right now to do that. Certainly, if we were to provide a live stream of this committee with simultaneous translation, then I think there would be some extra costs that we would have to do. Looking at BC, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, there are some things that are already out there that I believe we could accommodate that would give the citizens of Ontario a lot better access to our proceedings than what they have today.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: In that vein, I was just going to suggest that, with only minor changes in the wording, we could change the default option to make it so that committees will be broadcast. For example, the last sentence, with only tiny changes, could read, "Proceedings of any standing or select committee shall be recorded and broadcast unless agreed to the contrary by the House leaders."

1400

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Except that, again, we don't have the means to broadcast every committee. If you have three committees meeting—

Mr. Bob Delaney: All at the same time.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The only one that can be broadcast currently is the one in room 151. There's a huge expense to refitting the committee rooms to include cameras and interpretation and everything that's involved in broadcasting a committee hearing.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay, fair enough.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Just to recapture the conversation that has taken place thus far, so that I have a better understanding, we're talking about one room which has the capacity to broadcast live proceedings on our website. In other committee rooms, there is capacity to broadcast audio only—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): To be clear, we haven't explored that. What I'm saying

in response to Mr. Clark is that's something we could look into.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: So we know for sure that we have one committee room with that capacity, and the rest of the committee rooms we don't know yet.

My question to you is on cost. If we said every proceeding that takes place in that room is to be put on our website, there is no additional cost?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): In room 151?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Yes.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): There may be additional costs. Arleigh, do you want to—

Mr. Arleigh Holder: If it's going to be on the website, it's mainly bandwidth costs, which shouldn't be that much. Bandwidth costs keep going down every year.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Currently, the committee that's doing the forestry bill—web streaming that committee is not going to cost us anything because we've still got availability in the bandwidth.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: So the committee may need an estimation of additional cost.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: When I read what Mr. Delaney proposed, the word "live" didn't come into his amendment. You can provide recorded and broadcast hearings or events live in committee room 151, or you could broadcast an audio feed that you would archive for other committees that would be provided in other rooms. For example, it would be pretty simple for us to record our proceedings today and at some other date present them and have them available on the Internet. I can't foresee that that would cost us a ridiculous amount of money. I think we have the technology and the capability today to do that.

Certainly, if we were going to provide this room as a live video feed, yes, there would be some extra costs. But I think there are some things we can do today. We could move forward with the Amethyst Room being provided on a regular basis with some minimal costs. If you want to provide what those costs would be at another meeting of this committee, I'd be more than happy to listen.

I think the whole issue is intent. The technology is available today. It was proven last week at general government that we could provide that service, and I think it is part of this committee's mandate to discuss it. I think we should move forward.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: In terms of broadcast, what unit of measure are we using when we refer to bandwidth, and what capacity factors are we running right now?

Mr. Arleigh Holder: For the House, on an average day, it's not a lot of bandwidth, but during special days, like budget presentations, it will peak. That's when we get costs. I can't give an exact figure, but it's well within our budget.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I understand. I'm just curious: When the provider invoices you, what unit of measure are they using?

Mr. Arleigh Holder: They're using how many people connect at a certain time and current users and how long they're on for.

Mr. Bob Delaney: In terms of our capacity to serve, are we running a low capacity factor—for example, under 25% of our theoretical limits—or roughly where are we? Just give me an idea.

Mr. Arleigh Holder: I wouldn't know. I would have to check that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay, that's fine. I'm just curious.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Anybody else?

Is it possible, from your perspective, based on what you know we have today, to report back to committee with some options as to where we can upgrade and the associated cost, so at least somebody has a report and they'll never question it again?

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

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I think that would enlighten everybody as to what is available and what can be provided, probably in stages with every level having a cost to it.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): We're talking about streaming for audio and video? You're not talking about extending the broadcast?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I think Mr. Clark was saying that as long as it's recorded and can be broadcast later on, at least the public can see it. It's to make sure that all the committee rooms have the same capabilities.

Mr. Arleigh Holder: I think you mean as long as it's audio recorded.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes. I think you can audio record committees fairly easily. Based on what we've seen today on the tour, I think if we were to provide a live stream of this room similar to what we have in 151, it's going to cost us some money. I think we should know what that's going to cost us, but certainly I'm not advocating for that expense. We know now—at least I know from last week in general government—that there is an opportunity for us to provide live-streamed hearings of committees in room 151.

I don't know if there is any additional cost you would prefer to incur if that was going to happen on a regular basis. If there is, I think we should talk about it at committee. But I know, based on what I heard last week, that it certainly is very easy for us to accommodate, and I think we should do that.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Okay. We can report back.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Just taking up on the possibility Mr. Clark is asking us to explore; that is, for rooms other than 151 to record audio and then broadcast that recording on, I assume, the TV channel, which is going—

Mr. Steve Clark: We can provide it on the Internet as a podcast. Some Legislatures have a mobilecast that can go to your BlackBerry as well. There are a lot of different things that other jurisdictions right here in Canada are

doing. I think that when they're reviewing it, they should look at what's happening in other provinces: the bandwidth that's being incurred, the storage on the website for those archived items. I think it would be a pretty easy review from the Clerk's and broadcast services' departments to look at other jurisdictions. I have documents here from other provinces. I can provide them to the two of them, and we can get another report.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Okay. Definitely a sure cure for insomnia for anybody.

Mr. Arleigh Holder: In terms of storage, would you have any idea how long you would want to keep a committee's business?

Mr. Steve Clark: I don't believe we should be doing it like Hansard or anything.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): A short period.

Mr. Steve Clark: I would defer to you on what you think is appropriate.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Probably two weeks after the committee finishes its work.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If I might make a suggestion: as long as the bill being discussed is still active.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's not a bad idea, but then you could have some bill get second reading and never make it anywhere.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Well, so be it.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's why I said two weeks.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: There has to be an element of common sense, because we do have Hansard forever. The proceedings of the committee are recorded in written form, so in that situation, one can rely on that. If somebody really, really wants to hear what happened in the committee—if they really want it—they can read it in Hansard as well.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Having the option of the audio recording certainly makes it easier for Ontarians who have disabilities. So if we could offer that service and it's at a reasonable cost, I think it's worth our time to explore that option.

1410

Mr. Arleigh Holder: Will this also include committees that are travelling?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): No. That would be stretching it a little too far.

Mr. Steve Clark: But I think, based on what they provide at the actual travelling committee, there still is that capability. All you would need is a phone line, and you'd be able to stream those as well.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Why don't you report back on the options and the costs, and then the committee will discuss it?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): You can leave it to us to report back.

One of the other things we'll have to consider is being consistent with the French Language Services Act. Currently, when we broadcast from 151, it is broadcast in both languages. When we do a live web stream from 151,

it can be done in both languages. So you have to be aware of that too: If you're only providing the service in one language, you may run contrary to the French Language Services Act.

I think we need to consider the whole breadth of issues in this, and we'll come back to you with a full report.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): How long do you think it would take to review what other jurisdictions are doing, what's available, and then come back to the committee so we have an idea of when this will come back here?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Can we come back to you on an interim basis before the House adjourns and tell you where we're at?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Absolutely. Ms. Jones?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Just a quick question on the Hansard. I should probably know this, but is Hansard printed in French?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Hansard is printed in the language spoken. If you speak French in the House, you'll see that segment of Hansard in French.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So we don't currently provide Hansard in both languages. How do we get past that, with the French languages act?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Because it's considered an in-house document.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: The other issue we talked about in committee last week that I mentioned is certainly ongoing, and I know that you've looked at it a couple of years ago, is the issue of satellite broadcasting. I know that there are still some Legislatures that are on satellite. I just wondered if there were any comments that you had now, as opposed to what you found two years ago when the last review came to this committee.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): We're still struggling. The issue for us is kind of twofold. The CRTC has not yet—if it ever will—considered the issue of broadcast of legislative proceedings in a manner much like they currently allow for C-SPAN or making a provision for mandatory carriage of the proceedings via satellite and/or cable. We continue, along with other jurisdictions, to monitor that, and to push for them to give some consideration to doing that. So far we haven't had a lot of success.

This very topic comes up probably every other year when the Speakers get together at the presiding officers' meeting, because other jurisdictions are having the same problems that we are having.

You'll recall that we moved to C band in order to incur less cost. Other jurisdictions are now doing that, as well, because they're having trouble competing on the Ka band. So there's greater carriage on C band.

Saskatchewan is one of the other jurisdictions that's in almost the exact same situation we are with respect to satellite carriage. The Clerk there and I have spoken recently, and we're going to try to bring it up again at the

next meeting where all jurisdictions are present and try to get everybody on the same page with respect to pushing the CRTC on that issue.

Unfortunately, I don't really have anything positive to report. I will say that the problem has been mitigated somewhat by the live web streaming. We don't get as many complaints as we used to, because more people can access the proceedings on the Internet. It was further mitigated, I think, when we added the eight-day archiving component to the streaming, because people can now watch it whenever they want to watch it. But we are continuing to try and stay on top of that issue.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm a bit with Mr. Clark on the whole satellite thing. I find it a bit ironic that at the farm I can get the BC Legislature but I can't get the Ontario one. I know what's going on in BC, or at least my husband knows what's going on in BC.

When it comes to the webcast, unfortunately not all of rural Ontario has broadband, and certainly not high speed. So it becomes really difficult for most of rural Ontario to have access in the same way that others do. I find it a bit frustrating, as I say, that you can watch what BC is doing and you can't see what Ontario's doing.

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Chair, if I might—I want to agree. In a rural riding like mine where there are gaps in broadband access, it seems sensible for us to try to rally the other provinces together and have a made-in-Canada solution where perhaps we could all work together on providing access. Albeit it wouldn't be live access, but it certainly would be better access than now.

Some people in my riding joke about even our own TVOntario access—if they ever get restless and are up at 3 o'clock in the morning, they can see us, but they can't see us at 10:30 for question period or for anything else that we do.

So I do think that it would be a great thing if all the provinces did get together and try to work out something on the satellite issue. It would certainly bring down costs. But again, I can appreciate that unless we keep bringing it up and we try to rally it at the provincial level, we're going to have the same discussion every year or couple of years. It's frustrating.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: A few years ago in my private member's time, I had a resolution that called on the feds to have the CRTC make mandatory the broadcast of not merely the proceedings of the federal Parliament but also the proceedings of any province in which they choose to offer services, such that, for example, if you were a subscriber in Ontario, you would get the federal Parliament and you would also get the Ontario provincial Parliament. If you were in Saskatchewan, you would get the Saskatchewan Legislature etc. That obviously passed unanimously in the House.

It would be a good thing to put our federal members' feet to the fire from all parties and have them do that as well, because I think that's something that when people get cranked up about it, at least we can refer them to this and say, "So, watch it."

Maria was correct. There are a lot of areas where the local regional carrier just says, "I don't want to carry it, full stop."

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. Madam Clerk, just to clarify, when we met two years ago, we had the CRTC issue in front of us, and certain directions were given. If we could get that particular report just brought up to today's date and then a report on what we could do in the committee rooms in various phases and the pricing, and come back to committee. I'm in your hands, and I'm open to a suggestion as to what particular day you want to bring it back so I'll make sure I schedule the meeting.

Mr. Steve Clark: I just wanted to add something, Mr. Chair. It would be nice if, when the Clerk brings it back, we do consider having a resolution out of this committee back to all federal MPs after their May 2 election, just indicating how serious this issue is—

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I think that's what we did the last time, so that's—

Mr. Steve Clark: I think we should do that again.

And if the Clerk's doing a report, I'd love her to do a report on what other jurisdictions are doing with iPad access, too. I've talked to her about it a couple of times. I want to make it clear that I'm not promoting the use of iPads or electronic devices during question period. I think members' statements, like we've seen in the UK recently and in other jurisdictions—we should at least have a discussion about that use as well.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. Anything else from other members? Is everybody in agreement that that's what we'll do? We'll get a report back from the Clerk's office on what took place in 2008, what is the latest status, and then what we could do for broadcasting from the various committee rooms.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Just one question: Are we clear on timelines?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Clerk said she'll give us an interim report before we adjourn, which is sometime before June 2, and then there will probably be a final report to the committee after the election.

Mr. Steve Clark: Can I ask one more question? Under standing order 108, I believe we also have a committee mandate to hear from the Ombudsman from time to time. I just wonder if, along the same discussion we had a week ago about hearing from broadcast services and the Clerk, it's appropriate for us to do the same thing with the Ombudsman. The way I read the standing order was that we could do a similar review and discussion from his office on what's up with him.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I was going to suggest that we perhaps refer that matter to the subcommittee and discuss the next steps for this committee at that time.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's probably the way to go, because that's where we bring our business through, and we had the Ombudsman here when—

Mr. Steve Clark: But all I wanted to do was clarify whether that is part of our—

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Yes. It was done when I took the chair, I remember, and it was done when

Mr. Delaney was the chair. So we do go through it every so often. I would suggest that the subcommittee meet and look at that, and then come back to the committee.

Mr. Steve Clark: When will that be?

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: Right after committee?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): It could be right after committee. Who is on the subcommittee now?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It's Mr. Clark, Ms. Van Bommel and Mr. Prue.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay. I'll pick a date with the clerk's office, and we'll sit down together based on everybody's schedule.

Mr. Steve Clark: We're all right here.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: We're supposed to be here until 3.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): But I can't.

The television guidelines, the suggestion by the Clerk on item number 3: I would put that on hold until we hear back on the report as to what to broadcast.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I should be clear about that: It's not that guideline number 3 is terribly problematic for us.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): No. But if we change things, we would need to change this. We will review this at the same time we review your next report. All in favour of that? Carried.

We're adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1422.

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