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**Standing Committee on
General Government**

Committee business

1st Session
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Wednesday 28 April 2021

**Comité permanent des
affaires gouvernementales**

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Mercredi 28 Avril 2021

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Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Goldie Ghamari
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL GOVERNMENTCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
AFFAIRES GOUVERNEMENTALES

Wednesday 28 April 2021

Mercredi 28 Avril 2021

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1 and by video conference.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on General Government will now come to order.

We have the following member present in the room: MPP Crawford. The following members are participating remotely: MPP Bailey, MPP Bourgouin, MPP Glover, MPP Harris, MPP Sabawy, MPP Sandhu, MPP Schreiner, MPP Wai and MPP Tabuns.

We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

Please speak slowly and clearly, and wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Since it could take a little time for your audio and video to come up after I recognize you, please take a brief pause before beginning. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin?

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): On the agenda is committee business. Are there any motions? MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I move that the committee enter closed session for the purposes of organizing committee business and that broadcasting staff be permitted to remain in the closed session meeting for the purposes of operating the electronic meeting technology.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. MPP Harris has moved a motion. Any discussion or comments? MPP Tabuns?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm not sure what the committee business is that we're talking about, but I don't see any reason to go in camera when we're discussing organizing committee business. I think that the issue we're going to discuss should be on the table.

Frankly, since I'm guessing here, since I assume that we're going to be going through the set-up for debate or the hearings on a bill, I think there's every reason, in fact, this should be public. The public should know our reasons for setting particular timelines. I don't see that there's any particular secrecy that's required to do this. In fact, historically, when we've set schedules for bills—and again, I'm guessing, because I haven't been told what the business is today. But when we've been discussing the hearings for bills, we've done that in open committee, and the Legislature continued to exist.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further debate? I see MPP Bourgouin.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Bon matin. Écoute, un peu comme mon collègue, je ne vois pas la nécessité qu'on fasse ça derrière camera close. Je me demande le besoin de le faire. Je pense que, s'il y a de quoi, c'est qu'on a besoin de plus de transparence. On se demande pourquoi le monde est cynique quand ça vient aux politiciens et au processus parlementaire, mais ce sont des situations comme ça qui démontrent un peu pourquoi le monde est cynique. Au contraire, on a besoin de plus de transparence. On a besoin de démontrer à la population qui nous a élus qu'on fait leur travail.

Je ne suis pas d'accord avec la motion. Je crois que, dans le passé, il y a dû avoir des précédents où on voit qu'il y avait beaucoup de débats qui se faisaient dans le comité, puis c'était public. Ce qui fait que, je ne vois pas le besoin, puis je suis contre la motion du député de mettre ça en session close.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Merci. Further debate? MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm happy to explain why this process is being adopted here today for anybody who is viewing and for the members here as part of the committee.

Many of you will know that, typically, this would be done in a subcommittee meeting that is not televised, that is not recorded. There is no Hansard for it. Quite frankly, and it's unfortunate, over the last few months, members of the opposition—whether it be purposely or not, I don't know; I'm not going to presume—have been delaying subcommittee meetings. They have not wanted to participate in subcommittee meetings. Out of subcommittee meetings that we have had, they have ended up having to come back to the committee for a full vote anyway.

So rather than dither around and go through the process of delaying these bills—also, some of them had even been bills that have been put forward by their own members, which I find interesting, that they would want to delay those—we as government members and other members of the committee feel it's more prudent to just go ahead and do this, have a vote, if need be, with the whole committee here. That's the process we had to adopt because of what has happened with the members opposite. It's unfortunate, but it's where we're at.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to really take exception to what MPP Harris just said.

What we're talking about is—it says we're going to be organizing committee business. Why does that have to be done in secret? It makes no sense to do that in secret. This is supposed to be a democratic institution. Traditionally, these meetings would be taking place with public eyes upon us, which the public has the right to do. They have the right to watch what's happening in the committees, where decisions that affect their laws and their lives are being made.

We did this the last time we met over the last bill, and I asked at that time, why are we going in camera? Why are we going to go and have a secret meeting to organize committee business? I was told it was about personnel issues etc. There were no personnel issues discussed in camera. There was nothing that needed to be in camera. This speaks to this government's complete lack of transparency and their deliberate—well, I will say, their decision not to let the public watch how decisions are being made that are going to affect their lives.

I want to put on the record that I strongly object to going in camera to conduct this meeting in secret.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Glover, I would ask that you withdraw your comments regarding discussions happening in previous in camera meetings. I don't think that's an appropriate topic for discussion, because the subject of in camera meetings should remain in camera.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll withdraw.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you, MPP Glover.

MPP Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I have to say, Chair, the motion doesn't even state what business we're going to be addressing, which I find very odd.

And frankly, the process of deciding what date we're going to hear the public on—I'm guessing we're going to be organizing the public hearings for a bill. I don't see why we have to have that in secret—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Tabuns, since this is the second time that you're speaking, I would ask that you make sure your comments relate to new information or new topics of debate. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I have to say, Chair, that the matter before us is one in which the public has the right to know what decisions are being made. There may be people who object to that, but this has no bearing on cabinet decisions. There is nothing confidential, I'm going to assume, that's going to be coming before us. It's simply setting the dates and times for the public, I'm assuming, to speak to a bill and for us to debate on clause-by-clause. I don't see where that endangers anything. There's nothing risky there. There's nothing confidential. There's nothing to do with personnel. I, like my colleague, strongly object to the idea that we have to go in camera to actually set dates and times. Seriously, Chair, think about it.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Hopefully, to close this out here, I just want to reiterate what I said before: Normally, these meetings would be taking place outside of the committee to begin with, with the subcommittee members. It's unfortunate, as I said, but we're just not able to get through those meetings. All the information that comes out of this will be made public. They'll be able to see whatever dates and whatever times. Whatever decisions are made through the committee, as we'll discuss in a little bit here, will be made public for everybody to see—when these dates will be, so that they can register to take part in this process.

Organizing committee business is typically done by the subcommittee. We just haven't been able to get through these subcommittee meetings, and it's unfortunate.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Harris, I would also remind you to keep your—

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's it from the government side. We're ready to move forward and vote.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I'd just like to remind all members again to make sure that when they're speaking for a second or third time, they are making new points and not repeating points previously made. Thank you.

MPP Tabuns.

0910

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Historically, there have been subcommittee meetings where all parties present in the Legislature sat down and roughly sketched out what seemed to be a consensus on how to go forward, and then, Chair, there would be a meeting of the committee, where in fact a decision was made in public. From time to time, the decisions that came out of a subcommittee meeting—and they weren't formal decisions; they were: "Do we have a consensus on this?" From time to time, those would be varied, but the decisions would actually be taken in public, and I see no reason to vary practice.

We didn't have a subcommittee meeting? Fair enough. Then we'll have a debate in public, set a decision in public and go from there. But if you proceed going in camera and then afterwards don't have a public session where we debate and adopt, then I think this is a very bad departure from standard procedure in this Legislature.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Bourgouin?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Le député Harris vient de nous dire qu'ils nous demandent une session fermée, en camera fermée. Mais il vient de dire aussi en même temps que toute cette information-là va être publique. C'est comme parler des deux bords de la bouche, ça. Je ne comprends pas le besoin d'avoir une session fermée quand l'information va être publique pareil. Arrêtons de jouer des jeux politiques puis d'essayer de cacher de l'information au public. Il y a un processus qui existe. On devrait maintenir ce processus-là et savoir comment montrer de la transparence, comme j'ai dit, et s'éloigner du sarcasme politique que, souvent, ils nous disent, est tout le temps caché. Il y a des processus qui se sont faits dans le passé. On sait qu'il y a des pratiques. Je crois que—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Bourgouin, I'm sorry to interrupt you.

MPP Harris, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Mike Harris: I would take exception to the member saying that I'm talking out of both sides of my mouth. I find that to be rather unparliamentary. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I would like to remind all members to keep the debate and discussion civil and to maintain parliamentary decorum. Thank you.

MPP Bourgouin, please continue, unless you were done.

M. Guy Bourgouin: C'était juste pour continuer à dire que je suis fortement opposé au manque de transparence quand ça vient aux comités. On a une responsabilité de représenter le public, et la transparence en fait partie.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Merci, MPP Bourgouin.

Further debate? Seeing none, are members prepared to vote?

MPP Tabuns?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Recorded vote, please, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): A recorded vote has been requested.

I'd like to ask all members to turn their video on right now for the purposes of the recorded vote.

Ayes

Bailey, Crawford, Harris, Sabawy, Sandhu, Wai.

Nays

Bourgouin, Glover, Schreiner, Tabuns.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

We'll give Legislative Assembly staff a few moments to prepare for the in camera session, and then we will move in camera shortly. Thank you.

The committee continued in closed session at 0915.

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