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Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

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**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

IN-9

**Standing Committee  
on the Interior**

Selection of estimates

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Monday 8 May 2023

**Comité permanent  
des affaires intérieures**

Sélection des budgets  
des dépenses

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Lundi 8 mai 2023

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Chair: Aris Babikian  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Aris Babikian  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON THE INTERIOR**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT  
DES AFFAIRES INTÉRIEURES**

Monday 8 May 2023

Lundi 8 mai 2023

*The committee met at 0902 in committee room 1.*

**SELECTION OF ESTIMATES**

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Good morning. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on the Interior to order.

On April 20, 2023, the Lieutenant Governor transmitted to the Legislative Assembly the estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2024. Pursuant to standing order 62(b), these estimates, upon tabling, are deemed to be referred to the standing committees to which the respective ministries and offices were assigned pursuant to standing order 113(b). All committee members should have received an electronic copy of the 2023-24 estimates from the Clerk.

The objective of today's meeting is to select the estimates of certain ministries or offices for review by the committee. Standing order 63 sets out the process by which the committee makes its selections. Each of the recognized parties on the committee shall select the estimates of up to one ministry or offices in each turn. The official opposition selects first, followed by the government. If members of one party decline to make a selection, the selection then passes to the next party in the rotation. The process concludes when either there are no further ministries or offices available to select, or if both recognized parties decline to make any, or any further, selections.

Pursuant to standing order 63(c), these selections are to be reviewed in the order that they were chosen; however, this order may be altered by unanimous agreement of the subcommittee on committee business, or by order of the House.

Pursuant to standing order 63(d), the time for the consideration of the estimates of each ministry or office shall be determined by the respective committee.

The estimates of those ministries or offices not selected for consideration will be deemed to have been passed by the committee. As Chair, I will report those unselected estimates back to the House, and they will be deemed to be adopted and concurred in by the House.

In accordance with standing order 66(a), the committee must present a report to the House with respect to the estimates it selected and considered by the third Thursday of November of this year: November 16, 2023. If the committee fails to report by the third Thursday in November, the estimates and the supplementary estimates before the

committee will be deemed to be passed by the committee and deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

When making your selections, I would also like to add that if members could please look at the list of ministries and offices in the estimates book, or as displayed on the screen in front of you, and give the correct names of the ministries or offices when they select them for consideration.

Do members have any questions before we begin? Okay. Everyone has the list of the ministries, the estimates? Okay, so we will start the process. I will start with the opposition for their first selection. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I move that the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks be 15 hours in total; and

That, until the time allotted for consideration of estimates of the selected ministry has expired—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Excuse me, MPP Shaw. We're doing just the selection for now.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay, so I move the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay. Thank you. Now, we move to further selections. MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I move the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you.

Now, we move to the opposition again. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I move consideration of the Ministry of Energy.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Energy.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I move consideration for estimates of the Ministry of Mines.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Mines, thank you.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I move consideration of northern development.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw moved the consideration of northern development. Okay, thank you.

The government side.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I move the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Yakabuski moved the consideration for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

So it looks like that's it. We selected all the ministries. Thank you for the selection.

Is there any other business which members may wish to raise? MPP Shaw, yes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Do I move the time consideration now?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you.

I move that the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks be 15 hours in total; and

That, until the time allotted for consideration of estimates of the selected ministry has expired, the committee shall meet from 9 to 10:15 a.m. and 1 to 6 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays during weeks the House is sitting and from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 to 5 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays during weeks the House is not scheduled to meet.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** We will take a recess so that the opposition can put their motion.

*The committee recessed from 0910 to 0919.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** We're back. MPP Shaw moved the motion on your screen. Is there any debate on the motion? I see no debate on the motion. Is the committee ready to vote? All in favour of MPP Shaw's motion, please raise your hand. All in opposition, please raise your hand. The motion is lost.

Any other motions? MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I move that, pursuant to standing order 63(d), the following time be allotted to the consideration of the estimates of the ministries selected by the committee:

—the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for two hours;

—the Ministry of Energy for two hours;

—the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for two hours;

—the Ministry of Northern Development for one hour;

—the Ministry of Mines for one hour;

—the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for two hours; and

That the ministers responsible for those respective ministries be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for each ministry the minister be allotted 20 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the Minister of Northern Development be allotted 10 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the Minister of Mines be allotted 10 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the committee meet for the purpose of considering the estimates of the selected ministries at the following times:

—On Monday, June 5, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—On Tuesday, September 12, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and from 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That if any invited minister is unavailable to appear before the committee, the parliamentary assistant or parliamentary assistants may appear before the committee in their place.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The Clerk has distributed MPP Yakabuski's motion. Is there any further debate on the motion?

MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I'm very disappointed to hear that the government only wants to spend two hours on some of these very important ministries. Particularly, I'm going to speak to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks—two hours in total to ask important questions about this ministry that is certainly in the public square and is receiving terrible reviews. We see a ministry that is cutting back on any kind of environmental protections that we have in the province, moving unilateral decisions into the minister's office. This is during a time when we see development on the greenbelt, opening up of lands in the greenbelt, a historic issuing of MZOs in the province, and some deals concerning lands in the greenbelt that is now the subject of an Integrity Commissioner investigation. The Auditor General, as well, is looking at whether or not this government's disposal of lands in the greenbelt was, in fact, a good use of public dollars.

Let's be perfectly clear: The motion from the government would allow, on our side of the House, perhaps 40 minutes to ask questions. That is not a long time—40 minutes—when we proposed 15 hours to get to the bottom of some things that are really, really concerning to people in the province of Ontario. People are very worried about biodiversity. They're worried about climate change. They're worried about loss of prime agricultural land.

All of this is happening under the watch and under the jurisdiction of Minister Piccini and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

So I strenuously ask the government to extend this time. And I would like to ask the government what they are hiding. Why are they in such a hurry to dispose of these estimates when people deserve a right to ask questions? This is an opportunity for taxpayers in the province to understand how this government is spending their money. Clearly, this government does not want to be accountable to taxpayers and doesn't want scrutiny on how they're spending millions and billions of taxpayer dollars.

We on this side of the House in His Majesty's official opposition believe that we need to be accountable, we need to be transparent and we need to sit as long as it takes to understand exactly how money is being spent in this province.

Yet again, I'm deeply disappointed by this government, but let's just say I'm not surprised, because this is a pattern of behaviour since they've been elected.

I will certainly not be supporting this motion. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Any further debate? MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I appreciate the concern and the disappointment on the part of the member from the opposition. She knows well that with the changes in the standing orders, we want to bring estimates committee back to what it's supposed to be about, which is looking at and examining the spending estimates of each and every ministry that we will be bringing before this committee.

I can remind the member that the massive dissertation she had about everything that concerns her—they have the opportunity every single day here in question period to question the government and any respective minister on the things going on in their ministry or any other matters pertaining to governing here in the province of Ontario.

The estimates committee—we have changed the standing orders. The government members were here. The changes were made in order to make the committee more reflective of what its work and its task is supposed to be, which is examining the spending estimates of a ministry.

If they want to go on about the questions about what's going on in each and every ministry, well, we've put six of them here to have those questions, which will be able to have those spending questions made. But for the questions that are broad, we have question period. Plus, they can do any other way of raising those issues, whether press conferences or otherwise. But the estimates committee is not the place for that and we're going to ensure that it maintains its core mandate of examining the spending estimates of each and every ministry that is allocated.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, MPP Yakabuski.

Any further debate? MPP Vanthof.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I listened intently to Mr. Yakabuski and I would counter that even if we're only going to look at the spending of the various ministries, the time that the government is proposing is vastly, vastly too short. We aren't talking about our household expenses here; we're talking about funds raised by taxes. We're talking about millions of dollars. If the questions are exhausted, then the meetings could be shortened. But to say that an hour or two hours is all we need to discuss a ministry that—with all of these ministries that impact people on a personal level, there are spending considerations.

I'm quite surprised, actually, that the government is truncating this and making it so short. I would assume that the government would want Ontarians to know exactly where their money is being spent, that they would be proclaiming this exactly as opposed to trying to truncate this process.

I take the member at his word that he only wants to talk about where the money is spent. Quite frankly, on that point I agree. But to say that we, as members who are responsible for, quite frankly, keeping an eye on where the government is supposed to be spending its money—or spending Ontarians' money—this is kind of a shocking example of how this government doesn't want people to look where the money is actually going. And I'm quite surprised, especially

for new members, new government members, who seem to be content to hide. In the long run, hiding doesn't do you well and it certainly doesn't do Ontarians well.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Any further debate? MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Respecting the member of the opposition, Mr. Vanthof, the debate on the length of estimates was already held previously. They were part of it. We had that debate in this committee. We voted on it. And those changes to the standing orders that would also change the way that the estimates committee would operate, focusing on its core mandate, is something that's been decided by a committee of this Legislature. That debate has already been had.

All I hear from the member, then, is that he agrees with me, because he wants to talk about a past decision that's already been made and regurgitating it to this committee. The fact is, he said that on the issue of just spending, he agrees. The spending estimates are available to members of the Legislature. They're not hiding anywhere. I can share that with the member; he's aware of that. Those are available, and this committee, then, has an opportunity to ask specific questions on those said estimates. Other than that, it was decided through legislation, which came to a committee of this Legislature, that the length of time total of 15 hours allotted to all ministries would be divided up in such a way. That debate has been had.

I thank the member for his views, but we believe the motion is in keeping with the legislation and look forward to the vote.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Again, I want to reiterate how this is the place to ask questions about the millions and billions of dollars that the government is spending in these important ministries. The Ministry of Energy is a perfect example of the kind of ministry that deserves scrutiny from not just opposition but, as my colleague MPP Vanthof has said, from members of the government, from new members of the government.

I will remind the government that when I was first elected, I was appointed to the Select Committee on Financial Transparency. That was a committee that this government struck, according to them, to get to the bottom of the hydro mess and to look at the way in which Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government manipulated the books to minimize the deficit and took the cost of ratepayers and put it onto the taxpayers and vice versa. That committee sat for the better part of two months. I spent so much time on that committee. We called witnesses; witnesses testified. The former Premier, Kathleen Wynne herself, testified. The top bureaucrats came to testify. The government side called these witnesses. The government side wanted to get to the bottom of this hydro mess—which, in fact, I support and I agree, that's our job.

But now that we have a Ministry of Energy—the government said that they were going to clean up the energy mess; in my opinion, the energy mess or the hydro mess has just gotten messier. An example is that this government is now subsidizing hydro to the tune of \$6 billion,

maybe \$7 billion of taxpayers' money. There's a question. There's something that we would like to ask on behalf of Ontario's taxpayers—\$7 billion of hard-earned taxpayer dollars is being spent to subsidize Ontario Hydro, which is primarily a for-profit entity. This is the place for us to ask those questions.

The government was happy to have a Select Committee on Financial Transparency when it was the Liberals that they were looking to get to the bottom of their actions. But when it comes to themselves, when they have to look themselves in the mirror, they don't want anyone to see what's going on behind closed doors when it comes to this massive, massive subsidy of taxpayer dollars in the Ministry of Energy.

I don't understand why this government would run away from that. If this is a subsidy that makes sense, that your government is proud of, let's talk about this in the public square.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Any further debate? Seeing none, is the committee ready to vote? All in favour of the motion presented by MPP Yakabuski, please raise your hand. All in opposition, please raise your hand. The motion is carried.

Is there any other motion or business to be discussed in this meeting? I see none. So thank you very much for coming. We will advise you further on the next steps.

Thank you very much. Have a nice day.

*The committee adjourned at 0935.*









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