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Television broadcast system

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 19 November 2026

Chair: Teresa J. Armstrong
Clerk: Christopher Tyrell

Journal des débats (Hansard)

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Comité permanent de la procédure et des affaires de la Chambre

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA PROCÉDURE ET DES AFFAIRES DE LA CHAMBRE

Thursday 19 November 2026

Jeudi 19 novembre 2026

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

TELEVISION BROADCAST SYSTEM

The Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Good morning, everyone. I'm going to call the meeting to order. It's 9 o'clock. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will now come to order.

This committee's mandate is set out in standing order 109.1. Part of our mandate is to act as an advisory body to the Speaker and the House on the television broadcast system and to conduct reviews, at least on an annual basis, of the televising of the legislative proceedings and of the guidelines established by the House with respect to the television broadcast system.

We have with us today Michael Donofrio, director of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's broadcast and recording service.

Welcome, and thank you for making the time to appear with us today. We really appreciate this.

The committee is happy to hear from anyone with opening remarks that you may have. No takers? As there are no takers, we will pass the floor to Michael to give us a presentation, and then if there are questions or comments, we'll do that after the presentation.

I will leave it to you, Michael.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak about the Legislative Assembly's broadcast and recording service.

Seeing as how most of the members on this committee are new since I appeared here in 2024, I wanted to start off by giving you a brief history of the broadcast and recording service.

This October, the broadcast and recording service celebrated its 40th anniversary. The Ontario parliamentary network started broadcasting Ontario provincial proceedings in 1986. Our signal is distributed via satellite, cable TV and streamed around the world on our website and Parlance app. The audio signals from the House, committee rooms and our travelling committees are provided to Hansard publications and language services and are used to produce the official Hansard document.

When BRS started broadcasting in 1986, we had the capacity to broadcast the House and Amethyst committee room. These were broadcasted over traditional television only. The House always took priority and aired live gavel-to-gavel coverage on the Ontario parliamentary network. The Amethyst committee room would be recorded and played back later that evening, after the House adjourned for the day.

Today, we broadcast from five separate venues; this includes the House, all three committee rooms, and the media studio. We also broadcast travel committees live from locations all over the province. All these feeds are simultaneously interpreted live in both English and in French. Live, real-time closed captioning is also provided for the hearing impaired. And the public can present to any committee, including travel committees, over Zoom.

The media studio is operated by the broadcast and recording service on behalf of the press gallery. It provides a neutral forum for the government, opposition MPPs and interested groups to communicate with the media and the public. The media studio can be booked for press conferences by MPPs, ministries and officers of the Legislature.

BRS also provides an internal television network, which distributes seven television channels throughout the assembly: the House feed; the Amethyst Room feed; committee rooms 1 and 2; the media studio; an info channel; and CPAC.

We provide copies of footage, or dubs, on request, free of charge, via a Google Drive download. These are available to anyone, including members, staff, media and the public. So far in this session, we have processed an average of 73 dub requests per day.

At the request of the Speaker's office, the broadcast and recording service will document special events and ceremonies that occur at Queen's Park; for example, the Speaker's Series. Also, in previous years, we documented the Order of Ontario; the firefighter and police bravery awards; Lights Across Canada; and the Christmas choir series.

BRS will also provide the press with a television pool feed for special events that occur at Queen's Park; for example, royal visits, executive council swear-in ceremonies, the Lieutenant Governor's arrival by landau, and inspection of the royal guard. We also provide the audio set-up for non-partisan Legislative Assembly events and support for conferences hosted at the assembly. Recent examples of this include the lighting ceremony, the Clerks' conference, diversity week events, professional development days, the Speaker's portrait unveiling, the TIFF event and the upcoming Speaker's holiday party.

I would now like to go over some of the improvements we've made to the broadcast system since I appeared before the committee two years ago.

In 2024, the standing orders were changed, allowing Indigenous languages to be spoken in the chamber. We implemented technology to allow for simultaneous interpretation whenever an Indigenous language is spoken. This technology can also be used in remote locations so interpreters can work from their communities.

We started to produce short video content to educate the public about the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the legislative process. The team is producing an average of one video per week that airs on our broadcast, YouTube and social media channels. All these videos are produced in both English and in French and include closed captioning for the hearing impaired.

One of these stories, Voice of the North, won the Canadian Online Publishing gold award for best multicultural story last year. It also tied for second overall with two other pieces in their overall rankings, which included every submission from every category.

During the 2024 election, and for the first time in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's history, we provided live election coverage for all 124 ridings. This aired on our television channel, Parlance app and website. We became the first Legislature in the country to air live riding-by-riding results on election night. We also provided election coverage during the latest by-election in September.

If none of you have seen it, basically, they're information boards that start alphabetically with each riding, showing the people who are running, who's leading, with a banner at the bottom with overall totals. It's just the numbers with music in the background. There's no talking, there's no spin; it's just the numbers. There's no declaring winners; it's just so you can go see the numbers.

The funny thing is, on the day that we launched it, I was watching it with some of the other broadcasters, and we would go by ridings that were never being shown on any other broadcast, so we felt like we were giving a good service to areas that were just not being served. The team did an amazing job doing an election for the first time, and I'm so proud with the end product.

We added a new mace cam, camera 7, to the chamber. It's kind of discreetly installed in the Clerks' table. It almost looks like a little birdhouse, if you see it. But it's a really good shot for when the Sergeant-at-Arms puts down the mace or when there's an election of the Speaker. It just adds a little extra flair.

In 2022, we started a project to ingest and digitize the over 14,936 House and committee tapes that were being stored at the Archives of Ontario. These tapes dated back to BRS's beginnings in 1986. They were deteriorating quickly and were costly to store. This project is now almost complete. We only have a few hundred committee tapes left to digitize. All the House tapes are digitized. All this content is available in our eMAM asset management system.

In February, we launched a new segment called Question Period Rewind. This is actually a direct result of us being able to digitize all of our older content as well. Since I joined the LAO, there has always been a lack of television content when the House is not in session, when it's in recess. Question Period Rewind was devised to address this issue. When the House is in recess, we now air old question periods, one week or four question periods per day. We started with 1986 when we started, and we will air every year up until the current government was elected in 2018. We'll stop there.

Last spring, we rolled out an improved information sequence that airs when the House is not in session. This new sequence profiles each of the 124 ridings in the province and features riding maps and information about each riding, the member, their contact information and constituency office information.

We continue to replace some of our aging infrastructure. A few examples of this are, over the summer, we replaced the camera robotics system in the chamber. The system that we replaced dated back to BRS's launch in 1986. The company didn't even make them anymore. They weren't in business anymore, and we couldn't get any more parts. We had had other Legislatures, when they were decommissioning theirs, send them up to us so we could keep ours going for the longest time, and we decided over the summer that it was time we needed to replace them.

This winter, we will be replacing the television lights in the chamber. We're no longer able to source light bulbs for these current television lights, so we will begin replacing the fixtures with LED lights. These LED lights are not only rated to last around 20 years, but they will save the LAO significant money in electrical costs and cooling costs.

0910

Traditional copper phone lines are now being phased out over VoIP—or voice over Internet protocol—lines. Our closed captioning was being transmitted over these phone lines, so we needed to find another way of doing our closed captioning.

As a solution, we developed and implemented a closed-captioning-over-IP system for our five broadcast facilities. This also includes a low-latency streaming listen line so the captioners can hear our program audio.

That's all I have for now. I thank you and would open it up to any questions you may have.

The Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): I want to say thank you again for your presentation. I learned a lot, and I'm sure the members learned a lot as well.

I will now turn it over to committee members for any questions that they may have. I recognize MPP Riddell.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Are you a Sony guy, or a Canon guy?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: I do not have any preferences when it comes to this stuff. We try and obviously remain open to whatever is new. I do find that, as equipment evolves over time, one brand that was really good a couple of years ago isn't necessarily as good as it is now. Things evolve, and sometimes some things are just better for certain applications. So it all depends on the application.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Upgrading from 1986—it's like antique.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes. The one thing I can say that's very positive about the television broadcasting equipment is that it lasts quite a long time. It was built to last, especially the older stuff, so you can keep the stuff going. When you think about how long the House sits for, how long those cameras are operating, the fact that those robotics were never turned off—they're on all the time, even when the House is not sitting. They were just workhorses, and that is one of the great things about television equipment.

Some of the newer stuff that's coming out is becoming a lot more IP- and computer-based. We're going to have to start replacing some of that stuff more frequently than we did the stuff that was put out back in 1986.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Well, it's my opinion you do a great job.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): MPP Gallagher Murphy.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you. That was very informative. I remember when you came in 2024 and we had the tour. It was great.

One of the comments that you made there, I thought was interesting. When we're not in session, I think you said that you replay some of the question periods and things.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Question Period Rewind, yes.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Here's an idea. You talked about how you highlight—and I've seen it on the channels—each riding and you give who is the member and their constituency content, their contact information etc. I'm just wondering—I don't know if that's you to make this decision or who or us as a group—wouldn't it be nice to do a 10-minute or whatever, maybe 15-minute, overview of every riding, like the most unique places to visit in that riding? Because now, all of a sudden, you've got the opportunity to show all of Ontario all the great things in every single riding across this province. I don't know. I would love that idea.

Then we could tell our constituents, "Hey, listen in on such a date and you're going to see what's going on in Newmarket–Aurora or what's so beautiful about Newmarket–Aurora"—what's so beautiful about Burlington, or Cambridge, or London, or Welland. You know what I mean?

Anyway, I throw that out there because I think that would be really good for people—us as a province—to be able to illustrate what an amazing province we live in. Anyway, those are my two cents. Thanks.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Thank you. I think that something like that is a good idea. Unfortunately, we are bound by certain rules put in front of us by the CRTC.

All the legislative broadcasting television stations, including the federal government's as well, don't have to get a CRTC licence. In order to have a broadcast television channel, you need to apply for a CRTC licence. The CRTC has put in exemptions for us so that we don't need to get a licence.

But in order to broadcast under that exemption, we have strict rules we need to follow. Some of those rules are obvious, like no advertising, no trying to sell stuff. But one of the main rules is that we only cover the political proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. We're not really allowed to do other content.

Any of the extra content that we've tried to do by adding more content is directly related to the political proceedings themselves or the Legislature, how it runs, information about the political process. If we were to go out and do riding profiles, that has nothing to do with the political process. We would be going against our exemption that the CRTC gives us and could face up to a $250,000-a-day fine.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Wow.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes. We are very limited in what it is we can show. We've been looking at ways of adding more content, making things a lot more dynamic, but we're limited within those boundaries. We're able to do a little more if we're doing some stuff particularly for YouTube or something like that, something that's not going on our broadcast, because the CRTC doesn't regulate YouTube. But it does regulate our television channel, and we have to abide by those fairly strict rules about what we can air on the channel.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Those seem like very old rules. We need to get with the times because I'm just thinking, why wouldn't we be able to show, maybe, what the legislative implications are for every single riding? I don't know.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Again, one of the biggest parts of the mandate is we cannot editorialize. Some of the rules that the House has approved for our broadcast—you will notice that we're actually also very strict in what kind of camera shots we can take. We're really not supposed to be showing any kind of reaction shots or anything that might appear to be editorializing.

We're here as a fly on the wall to document history, and we're here for the entire Legislative Assembly, so we don't want to have any kind of look like we're being biased to one party or to any agenda of any kind. We're just documenting the history. We're just here to show the public who can't make it here to Toronto to sit in the galleries an opportunity to view what is going on without any kind of editorializing whatsoever. They hear exactly what you say. They see exactly what's going on that way. We're just documenting it.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Interesting.

Okay, well, that would be my thing.

The Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Any further questions? MPP Denault?

MPP Billy Denault: I just was going to say, Michael, first of all, thank you for coming in and sharing a history and the work that the Legislature is doing in terms of the broadcasting system. I think I can speak for all of us in saying that you guys do a wonderful job and we really appreciate all the work that you do in terms of showcasing history. I know I've seen the Question Period Rewind, some of it a little bit before my time, but it's always good

to be able to see Sean Conway, my predecessor's predecessor, in question period and his work at Queen's Park. So I just want to say thank you, I think on behalf of everyone here, for all the work that you do and the broadcasting system does for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Well, thank you very much. I wish I could take the credit. I have an amazing team that works with us every single day that are making me look good.

The Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): On camera—making you look good on camera.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes. That's the hard thing.

The Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): That's right.

On that note, if there are no further questions, I want to say thank you for your presentation here today and for providing us with an update and answering our comments and questions.

Is there any other business or discussion that we have for today? Seeing none, I adjourn the meeting. Thank you very much to everyone.

The committee adjourned at 0920.

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