



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on the
Economy

Monday, July 14, 2008
11 a.m.

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Standing Committee on the Economy

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Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L), Deputy Chair

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Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC)
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Bill 204 Sponsor

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[Mr. Allred in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the first meeting of the Standing Committee on the Economy. My name is Ken Allred, for the record. I guess, first, I'll just ask everyone to introduce themselves around the table.

Mr. Marz: Good morning. My name is Richard Marz, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Weadick: Greg Weadick, MLA for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Xiao: David Xiao for Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Blakeman: Laurie Blakeman, and normally I would welcome you to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, which is still fabulous, but the weather's a little wet.

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Parliamentary Counsel.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. I'm Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Ms Sorensen: Rhonda Sorensen, manager of communications services, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mrs. Kamuchik: Louise Kamuchik, Clerk Assistant, director of House services, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Campbell: Robin Campbell, MLA, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Bhullar: Manmeet Bhullar, MLA, Calgary-Montrose.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk with the Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Just a few housekeeping items. You don't have to do anything with your communication devices; they will be automatically turned on by the *Hansard* staff. If you would put all of your BlackBerrys in your holster because they interfere – or turn them off. That would be even better.

We are here because the Legislative Assembly has referred Bill 204 to us for review. First item. We all have an agenda, and I believe everybody received the package in a binder, did they? Everybody has that? Okay. If we could have a motion to approve the agenda as circulated. Greg. Any discussion? All those in favour? Those opposed? Motion is carried.

At this point I'd like to turn the floor over to Shannon Dean, Parliamentary Counsel, to give us a quick overview of the committee's mandate.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The mandate for the Standing Committee on the Economy is set out in Standing Order 52.01, and it relates to the following areas: Advanced Education and Technology, Employment and Immigration, Finance and Enterprise, Infrastructure, and Transportation. Clearly, your mandate is very broad. However, the Assembly has charged you with a specific issue, and that is Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008. The Assembly has referred this legislation to you under Standing Order 74.2.

Now, if I may just touch upon, very briefly, the powers, rights, and privileges of committees of the Assembly. This is item 3(b) on

the agenda. You do have powers beyond the specific bills or matters that are referred to you by the Assembly. However, one thing to bear in mind is that an order of the Assembly that a bill, regulation, or other subject matter stand referred to a committee is the priority of the committee, and the reference there is Standing Order 52.04.

With respect to parliamentary privilege and the rights and privileges of this committee I would like to remind you that it's a committee of the Assembly, not a cabinet policy committee. Therefore, many of the privileges and immunities of the Assembly flow through to you and this committee.

Most importantly, you enjoy the benefits of parliamentary privilege, a key element being that you're protected from defamation with respect to the proceedings of this committee. Again, these are outlined in section 13 of the Legislative Assembly Act. It states that a member cannot be subject to a civil action or prosecution by reason of any matter brought by the member before the Assembly or a committee of the Assembly or by reason of anything said by the member in the Assembly or any committee of the Assembly. This privilege also extends to witnesses before the committee.

Finally, another power of this committee is the ability to summon witnesses. To date, committees in the Assembly have not had to resort to this power. Typically, the approach that's been followed is that the committee extends an invitation, and that invitation is accepted. However, if there wasn't co-operation, the committee could issue a summons through something called a warrant, which would be done through the Speaker. This power is spelled out in section 14 of the Legislative Assembly Act.

Now, if I may, I'll just move on to the relevant standing orders and functions of the policy field committees. This is item 3(c).

The Chair: Before you do, I'd like to welcome my deputy chair, Dave Taylor, Calgary-Currie. Welcome, Dave.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

The Chair: Sorry, Shannon. Go ahead.

Ms Dean: Oh, that's fine.

Again, the relevant standing orders that pertain to the functions of policy field committees are outlined in temporary standing orders 52.01 through 52.09 and standing orders 74.1 and 74.2.

To summarize, the committee is charged with whatever matter is referred to it by the Assembly. This may be a bill or another subject matter, and that's the priority for the committee. The committee may also receive a request from a minister to inquire into a matter within the committee's mandate. This is what occurred last year with respect to one of the policy field committees, and that had to do with an examination of the beverage container recycling regulation.

The committee may undertake to study issues on its own initiative through an inquiry. The relevant standing order there is 52.07. The committee may also undertake to review any regulation within its mandate. The citation there is 52.03. Finally, the committee may wish to examine the annual reports of the departments and agencies within its mandate. Under Standing Order 52.05 all of these reports are deemed to be permanently referred to the committee.

The committee does have authority to conduct public hearings on any bill or regulation. Also – and this is one of the new provisions in the standing orders this year – the committee may hold public meetings on any matter within its mandate.

Before I move on, Mr. Chair, are there any questions, or would you like me just to proceed?

The Chair: Does anyone have any questions at this point?

I think you can proceed, and maybe we'll hold all questions till the end.

Ms Dean: Sure. Item 3(d), the review process with respect to what you have before you and the role of the bill's sponsor. I think it's important to note that you're in new territory because a private member's bill has not yet been the subject of a review by a policy field committee. There was a private member's bill referred late last year, but there wasn't an opportunity for a review to be conducted.

Some general principles are that you have a fairly broad scope of review given that Bill 204 has not yet received second reading by the Assembly. Bearing that in mind, it's up to the committee as to what type of process it undertakes in connection with the review of the bill. You may wish to advertise for written submissions from the public. You may wish to solicit input from select stakeholders. The decision rests with you. An additional consideration is whether you'd like to invite the public or certain stakeholders to appear before you. These are all decisions that will impact your communications strategy, and our communications officials will discuss that with you later.

Another point I want to raise with you is that it's common practice for a committee that's looking at a bill to invite officials from the relevant government department to provide a technical briefing. Again, we're dealing with a private member's bill here, so that doesn't really apply. However, you may wish to invite the sponsor to provide an overview of the bill. You may also want to consider inviting government officials in the event that they have comments on the proposed legislation because they are responsible for administering the relevant statute.

The final point under Orientation is the committee report. As noted earlier, the bill was referred under Standing Order 74.2, so under the standing orders the report itself can contain your observations, opinions, and recommendations. This type of report may differ from the reports that you are familiar with from last year where most of the bills were referred after second reading. Typically a report on a bill, I would say, would focus on the general subject matter as opposed to specific wording on legislative amendments, but there's nothing that precludes you from making recommendations about amendments.

Now, the next step in the process after the committee reports would lie with the House. In this instance we're in, again, uncharted ground given that we've never had a bill referred to a committee in the middle of second reading debate. However, I think it's reasonable to presume that once the committee reports, assuming that the report is that the bill proceed, then the House would have to concur in that report before the bill would go forward.

I'll conclude my comments right there.

The Chair: Okay. We have one question. Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I think with your careful wording you answered part of my first question, which is that we may invite particular experts from government departments to offer comment on the bill because they'd be responsible for implementing it if passed.

My second question is: seeing as it's been referred in the middle of second reading debate, is the principle of the bill open for our discussion and comment and possible recommendations for amendments for change?

Ms Dean: Yes. You've got a broad scope of review because the principle has not been agreed to by the Assembly.

Ms Blakeman: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Further questions? Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Allred. I may have missed something somewhere along the line here, but is there a specific date that we're required to report back to the Legislature, given that this is a private member's bill?

11:10

The Chair: Ms Dean, do you want to respond?

Ms Dean: The motion that referred this bill did not indicate a reporting date.

Mr. Taylor: That's what I thought.

The Chair: In fact, if we want to get it back to this session, we have to have it in by middle of October anyway, don't we?

Ms Dean: The decision rests with the committee with respect to the reporting timelines, but I think, Mr. Chair, you were going to address that later on.

The Chair: Yeah. It would seem to me that if we didn't get it in – well, certainly if we didn't get it in during the session, it would be history, and I would think we would have to get it in early enough for the members of the Assembly to consider it.

Ms Dean: I think that would be a prudent approach.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions?

I would like to welcome Moe Amery, Member for Calgary-East. Welcome, Moe.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: We're just still on the Committee Orientation. We've just heard from the Parliamentary Counsel. Any further questions of Shannon?

Okay. We will then move on. Jody Rempel is the committee clerk assigned to the committee. The committee clerk provides administrative and procedural assistance to the committee and is the primary contact for committee business.

Ms Rempel: Thank you. Hello.

The Chair: You didn't have any further comments?

Ms Rempel: No, not unless anyone has any questions for me or anything.

The Chair: Okay.

We have Rhonda Sorensen with us. She's the manager of communications services with the Legislative Assembly, and we'll use her expertise to draft and implement an effective communications strategy based on our discussions.

Rob Reynolds is not here. He's Senior Parliamentary Counsel, but Shannon Dean has very capably filled in for him today.

Philip Massolin is the committee research co-ordinator, and his staff are here as well to provide nonpartisan research activities to the committee and to assist in the drafting of committee reports. I would emphasize that his role is to provide nonpartisan research services. Each caucus has their own research services that they can rely on as well.

Okay. The committee budget was distributed, and I don't seem to have a copy handy, but nevertheless the budget covers pay to members, travel expenses for meetings, advertising, and hosting

during meetings. Expense accounts have been circulated. If you would fill them in and sign them and hand them in to Jody, she will look after them. The budget is an information item only, so no motion is required, but if there are any questions, we'll certainly field them. No questions? Rhonda, do you want to make any comments on the advertising budget?

Ms Sorensen: Maybe not at this point, Mr. Chair, other than there is money set aside for advertising should the committee wish to do that.

The Chair: Okay. I guess there are really no questions on the budget, and as I indicated, that doesn't require a motion.

We've got several decisions to make regarding the input process for the review of Bill 204. The Assembly did not assign a specific reporting date for the committee on this matter, as was mentioned. However, the other four policy committees will be reporting on bills by the last week of October. I see no reason why we shouldn't proceed according to a similar schedule in order to get it back on the agenda for the fall sitting, but I'm open to comments on that.

Mr. Marz: I think, in fairness to the member that brought this forward – as was mentioned, if it's not dealt with, then it dies on the Order Paper. Therefore, I think it would be prudent for us as a committee to ensure that we stay with that same guideline and schedule.

The Chair: Any contrary opinions to that? I think that's only fair.

Okay. On that point, on technical briefing of the bill, does the committee want to invite the sponsor of the bill to come and make a presentation?

Mr. Marz: I would think that would be one of the first things we should do, but I would also like to hear from the Minister of Transportation and the Solicitor General or someone from their staff at that same meeting.

The Chair: Okay. Perhaps we can just deal with the sponsor of the bill. If we're in agreement, if someone would make a motion. Is there another question? Ms Blakeman, did you have a question or comment?

Ms Blakeman: Not on this motion, so if we can deal with the motion.

The Chair: Okay. If someone would like to introduce a motion that the Standing Committee on the Economy invite the sponsor of Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008, to provide a briefing on the bill at the next committee meeting.

Mr. Marz: I'll move that.

The Chair: Any discussion? All those in favour? Those opposed? The motion is carried.

Ms Blakeman: I'm just wondering if we can – and I may have moved to item (c) here – start out with any baseline, nonpartisan background information being provided on the sort of debate as it exists out there in Canada right now with a briefer about who has it, who doesn't, who says yes, who says no. So (a) is that available now, and (b) could we get it in a nonpartisan manner?

The Chair: Certainly that's one of the issues we're going to address a little later on, but if I happen to overlook it, remind me.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

The Chair: Now, as I think was mentioned earlier, it might be beneficial to invite officials from Alberta Transportation and possibly some other departments to make presentations. Alberta Transportation is responsible for the administration of the Traffic Safety Act. Maybe it would be useful to hear that department's views on this bill.

Mr. Marz: If I may, Mr. Chair, I think that would be important, but I think it's also important to hear from the department that has to enforce it, and that would be the Solicitor General's department.

The Chair: Is there a general agreement on that? Okay. If someone would like to move that

the Standing Committee on the Economy seek comments on Bill 204 from Alberta Transportation and Alberta Solicitor General and invite officials to be in attendance at the next meeting.

Mr. Weadick: I'd be willing to move that. Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion? All in favour?

Mr. Taylor: I'll second it.

The Chair: Just on a point of procedure, we don't require seconders in these meetings. So I'm informed.

Any discussion? All in favour? Those opposed? The motion is carried. Thank you. With your agreement I'll send a letter to the sponsor and to the two departments inviting them to make presentations at our next meeting.

Now we come to the next item, Public Input Options – Written Submissions, Public Hearings, Other. The committee needs to decide how it will communicate with the public. There are a number of options. We can identify stakeholders and invite interested parties to appear. Does anyone have any suggestions about identification of stakeholders or interested parties who should specifically be advised about the review of Bill 204?

Dr. Massolin, maybe you want to comment on that, and then we'll take Mr. Taylor's question.

Dr. Massolin: Mr. Chair, I was going to mention in general the sorts of research that the research section can provide for this committee, and it includes putting together a stakeholders list as well as a cross-jurisdictional comparison. I was going to do that under item (c) if I may, but it's up to you. I can talk about those points now if you wish.

The Chair: You can go ahead and talk about it now if you like.

Dr. Massolin: Yeah, sure. I just want to explain to committee members what the research section does and what the research staff for the Legislative Assembly can provide for this and other policy field committees. As you mentioned yourself, Mr. Chair, we provide nonpartisan research support, and the way in which that is done in terms of doling out research assignments is to have those tasks assigned through you the chair and the chairs of these various committees.

The other thing that I wanted to point out is that we're able to assist the committee in a variety of ways, including gathering information. One of the ways we can do that is by helping to put together a stakeholder list, a draft list. And we, of course, welcome

as much input as the committee is willing to give us in terms of putting that together. We could do that for the next meeting.

The other research product in terms of information gathering is a cross-jurisdictional comparison. We've already started on doing something like that, and we could finalize that for the next committee meeting as well. Other sorts of things that we can provide are summaries of written submissions, should those happen, summaries of an oral submission process as well, analysis there as well. We can also lend assistance, as you mentioned, Mr. Chair, in terms of drafting the final report that is tabled to the Assembly, and we can provide other research support as the committee proceedings progress through the summer and fall.

11:20

One other thing I should note is that on the internal website under the documents and resources link there is a news clippings PDF link. If you click that link, you'll find a variety of news articles from a variety of jurisdictions in Canada and internationally where you'll see information on cellphone bills or hand-held communication device bills. The committee members, of course, are welcome to read that information that we've already put together, and we're updating that information as the days and weeks move along.

That's about it.

The Chair: What information is on the website right now? *Hansard* is on there regarding the Bill 204 debate.

Dr. Massolin: Yes. Right.

The Chair: And the clippings. Anything else?

Dr. Massolin: Well, the bill itself.

Jody might be able to add others. Are there annual reports?

Ms Rempel: Yes. There are annual reports that, depending on what kind of activities the committee may wish to take on in the future, could be useful to you as they do relate to your mandate as well as just general information regarding committee membership and scheduling and so forth.

The Chair: The annual reports aren't relative to Bill 204, though.

Ms Blakeman: They're the annual reports from the ministries that are included, are they not?

Ms Rempel: That would fall, yes, essentially under your mandate.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay.

Mr. Taylor: Well, actually, Mr. Chair, I was going to ask if we could move item (c) up ahead of item (b) because I thought that Dr. Massolin's input as he just gave it might be useful to us in determining some of the stakeholders that we wanted to identify and so on and so forth.

I guess I have two questions. One is just for information, and the second one is more of a request of Dr. Massolin. First of all, in terms of information, how quickly can you get back to us with a list of stakeholders that we might want to consider issuing invitations to?

My second request would be specifically that you, in pulling together the background research, look to see if there's any research out there on hands-free devices as well, because 204 as it's written now speaks specifically to hand-held cellular phones and things like

that, and my understanding is that there is some research – although I don't know how good it is – that indicates that, in fact, the hands-free devices are just as distracting to the driver's attention as the hand-held.

Dr. Massolin: Right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. In terms of putting together a stakeholders list and turning that around, it would be a matter of just a few days to do that, I think, for this information. I guess it's up to the committee to decide whether we should go ahead in terms of providing other information. I know of some of the studies that the committee member is indicating here in terms of hands-free devices and their effect on drivers, so we could also do that, if that's the direction the committee would like us to go.

The Chair: I think it's a good suggestion to deal with item (c) before (b). Does anyone have any objection to that, if we deal with the background research materials first? Then we get into the public input.

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. So let's deal with the background research. Are we comfortable with what Dr. Massolin is proposing to provide? Okay. If we can have a motion that the standing committee direct that the research co-ordinator compile the related legislation. Is that basically what it was?

An Hon. Member: Cross-jurisdictional.

The Chair: Cross-jurisdictional legislation. And was there something else?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. The use of hands-free devices, the comparison there.

The Chair: Okay. Yeah. The use of the hands-free devices.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It's one thing to say you can't hold it in your hand, but having it in a dock in your car may have the same effect.

Dr. Massolin: Yeah. Just to get some clarification, I guess, the three products, if I understand it right: a draft stakeholders list . . .

The Chair: We'll deal with the draft list later.

Dr. Massolin: Oh, I'm sorry. We'll deal with that later.

The cross-jurisdictional comparison, certainly, and then research in terms of the hands-free devices. In terms of that would the committee simply like copies of reports? Would the committee like us to simply summarize some of the findings of these reports?

The Chair: Is that the consensus of the committee, that we'd like summaries of the reports?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Campbell: I'm just wondering about the hands-free feature and whether or not we're overriding what the bill was intended to do in the first place, and that was about holding a cellphone in your hand. My recollection of the debate was that hands-free devices were still going to be allowed. I'm just wondering with us doing the research on that if we're going further than the bill was intended to go.

The Chair: Certainly the intent of the bill is very clear: to restrict it to hands-free. But as Ms Dean indicated, our hands are not tied. We can make whatever recommendations we wish, so I don't see any reason why we shouldn't get the material. Then we'll debate it and decide whether to restrict it to what has been proposed in the bill or to broaden it.

Mr. Campbell: Okay.

The Chair: Does anyone have any other comments?

Mr. Xiao: I would like to move the motion.

The Chair: Okay. It's moved by the standing committee to direct that the research co-ordinator compile the cross-jurisdictional analysis, the reports on the hands-free, and the summary of the reports.

Is the motion clear to everyone? Any discussion? All in favour? Those opposed? The motion is carried. Thank you.

Okay. We will move back to (b), which is identification of stakeholders. Discussion on that item?

Ms Blakeman: I'm just wondering what we're anticipating here. Do we think we're going to do a public hearing? Do we think we're going to ask for written submissions? Do we think we just want to know who is out there that cares? Those all indicate different kinds of lists. What is it that the committee is contemplating? Are we just trying to suss out what's out there and happening before we decide how we're going to proceed? Our time is limited if we're trying to give a final report by the end of October. I'm just curious as to the will of the committee generally as to what we think we're going to do with this because a list of who we'd like to invite to present to us is very different than a list of submissions or a public hearing, which is, of course, wide open and we have no control over it.

The Chair: I think that's an excellent point, and I think that, really, the crux of our meeting today is to determine how broad we go.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure if we need to do too broad-based a public consultation on this. Surprisingly enough, I have had quite a number of submissions on this from constituents, so it seems that the public is well aware that this is before the House. I've been approached, last week probably half a dozen times on this. One was from a trucker that was driving at the time, thinking it was a good idea to restrict it. We had a discussion on that as well.

Mr. Taylor: On the phone?

Mr. Marz: On the phone. Yeah.

I think the public is well aware through the course of the debate in the spring that this is out there, and I don't think we need to redo a whole public consultation on this. We're hearing about it in our constituency offices. I'm sure I'm not the only one that's hearing from people. I think we can bring that to the table ourselves, what we're hearing out there, and if we want to look at a selected group that would maybe bring various perspectives, experts, to the table, I'd be open to that, but I don't see the necessity of a whole broad-based thing.

The Chair: There certainly has been a lot of comment in the media.

Dr. Massolin, do you want to comment a little bit more on the proposed stakeholder list you were thinking of?

11:30

Dr. Massolin: Well, not really, in the sense that I don't have a

number. I've got categories in my mind in terms of who we might consult, but I don't have specific stakeholders. I haven't really thought that through. I mean, it's up to the committee, of course, to decide how broad or how narrow this list would be.

The Chair: David.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. I think, given the time we have, that written submissions should be sufficient. This is, you know, what the issues were. This bill is in front of the House, so I would suggest that written submissions would be sufficient.

The Chair: Are you making a motion that we have written submissions only?

Mr. Xiao: Sure.

The Chair: Any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Weadick: I guess my major issue would be: are we trying to get public input? That's one type of written submission, which is going out and trying to gauge where the public is on this. I think most of us are pretty comfortable about where the public is. Or are we trying to get technical input? I'm thinking the insurance brokers or policing departments or something, because whoever we're inviting, it's either to just get broad public input, or it's very specific: to get technical input that would help us make a decision on this specific bill. I'm not sure what technical information I would need to go forward on this bill. I guess maybe that's where the stakeholder list would come in. You could look at it and say: yeah, that seems to be relevant.

I'm not sure that sending an e-mail out to let everybody in the public send in written submissions, unless we have time to decipher them and are going to be able to take some advantage of them, has any real value in it. But there may be some technical organizations that could bring knowledge through their industries. I'm thinking of insurance brokers' associations or something like that that could show us some specific information that they have that would help us to determine the value of the legislation. I'd like to see that list compiled, from my perspective, for technical information that may be helpful to me to make a decision on the relevance of the bill as opposed to a broad-based public input session.

The Chair: I think the motion before us is for written submissions, which would rule out public submissions.

Mr. Taylor: Not necessarily. Written public submissions.

The Chair: No? Okay. Sorry. Your motion was that we have written submissions?

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. You know, that we have written submissions, like from identified stakeholders.

The Chair: Okay. So you're not saying only written submissions?

Mr. Xiao: Only written submissions.

The Chair: From identified stakeholders.

Mr. Xiao: From identified stakeholders.

The Chair: That was my understanding.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah.

The Chair: Am I wrong in saying that that would rule out public submissions?

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Chair: So that's the motion before us. I think if we can determine whether we want written submissions only, that should be the first step.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, Mr. Chair, as Greg indicated, I think it would be very worth while for us to ascertain some specifics with respect to ways in which this particular piece of legislation in front of us can perhaps work with cellphones and other distractions as a whole. I think this may be on the agenda at a later time. If we're looking at some sort of a stakeholder list, then perhaps we set a deadline to have written submissions, and then perhaps we identify a couple of questions today and submit those to some specific stakeholders that we may feel are appropriate.

The Chair: Okay. Let's determine if we're agreed on just written submissions.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm arguing against the motion as it was amended because I would prefer to leave it at just the focus that it be a written submission. I don't like cutting out the public with the additional words that the member sponsoring the motion has put in, in that it's an identified list or a particular list that we've requested organizations to give a submission. My question back to you would be: why would we ban the public from putting in a written submission if they chose to do so? The motion as it stands right now is saying that we'll take written submissions from an identified list. I'm making the assumption here as well that the identified list does not include members of the public. I would say: why?

You know, I've sat on a lot of these committees. You don't get that many people that want to go through the time and effort of making a written submission and sending it in to you. You'll get less than half a dozen, usually one or two. So I guess I'm arguing against the motion as it has been put forward on the floor. I can see no reason to preclude the public taking part in this debate, if they wish to do so, by doing a written submission.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Just to add to what Ms Blakeman was saying. Dr. Massolin's list of potential stakeholders will most certainly focus on stakeholders that will tend to speak to the more technical matters associated with this, I think. That along with the cross-jurisdictional comparison will give us a sense of some of the technical issues that other jurisdictions have perhaps encountered so that we may want to make some specific recommendations to do it this way or do it that way to avoid this problem, that sort of thing. The fundamental questions are: is this a safety issue worth pursuing, and how does the public feel about that? So I don't think we should restrict it just to stakeholders. I think we should keep it open to the public as well. I'm quite prepared to support the notion that we do it all in writing, however, in the interests of time.

The Chair: I guess I thought that's what the motion was going to be, but we added a few words in there.

Mr. Weadick: Well, I'd like to support the motion the way it is, and then if after that we determine there is some requirement to go to the public, we're going to have to come up with a communications plan

to notify the public. If we're going to have meaningful public input, other than three or four people, we're going to have to come up with a way to actually get them energized to do it. I don't believe that three people writing e-mails in or something is meaningful public input. I don't think that's fair to the public. I think this deals with the technical side, and I would support this and ask the committee to support it and move forward.

If someone wants to bring forward a process to try to get public input on a broader scale, whether it be written, verbal, or something else, that's another issue we should discuss. That's very significantly different than written submissions on the technical merits or issues around this bill. I hate to mash the two together. So I would be standing in support of this resolution, and then we can talk about how we might get some public input if that's part of the committee's mandate as well.

The Chair: I'm going to ask David to clarify his resolution because as I understand it, it says written submissions from a stakeholder list only, which would preclude the public. If you could clarify exactly what your motion is intended to be.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. The reason we're talking about this issue here is because of the importance to public safety. We are talking about the public. In order to get it right, we need, first of all, to do the research. That's why we moved to (c), you know, the background and research.

Also, we've got to hear the people, identified stakeholders, about this opinion. Then, like my colleague said, if we decide to go for public opinion, we've got to make sure that all public are well informed and that it's a fair process to everybody, to all concerned. That's what I'm saying. My motion is

for written submissions from identified stakeholders.

Okay? Then if we decide to have a public hearing or written submissions, then we can do that as well.

Mr. Weadick: It's a separate motion.

Mr. Xiao: So it's a separate motion.

The Chair: So the intention of your motion is not to restrict it only to stakeholders, the identified stakeholders?

Mr. Xiao: No. That's a separate motion. This motion is for the written submissions from identified stakeholders.

Ms Blakeman: An apology to my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-West. I did not make it clear that in the time that I have sat on these various committees, there have been various attempts at public input and requests for participation, and even with that you get one or two. I was not suggesting in any way that there not be an attempt but that that has been the result, in my experience, that I've seen in the past.

Again, I would be interested in more input from the committee because I've yet to hear a compelling argument for why we wouldn't want to accept any written submissions from the public. I've heard no arguments based on a timing problem or an expectation of massive amounts of reading material. I haven't heard any arguments at all, actually, about why we would be excluding those members of the public who wish to make the effort to participate. So I look forward to hearing that compelling argument.

11:40

The Chair: Moe.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much. I tend to agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre. If we're doing it in the interests of

the public, why are we excluding the public from making submissions and participating in this?

I heard yesterday that cellphones right now are your best friends, so this is going to be a hard decision for us to make to ban the use of cellphones. I use the phone myself maybe three, four hours a day. I think that if we're doing it in the interests of the public and for the safety of the public, the public should be involved and should be able to make submissions, and it could be written submissions.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Chairman, I believe the mover of the motion has already answered the question. This is dealing with one aspect. If we want to deal with public consultation, whether that be through public meetings or through written submissions, that can and should be dealt with in a subsequent motion to this. We can get on with this aspect of it and deal with this motion and then have the floor open for another motion dealing with public input.

The Chair: Yeah. I don't think the motion precludes public input, so we could either amend this motion or have a separate motion for public input. I think we maybe should deal with the motion, unless there's any further concern. All those in favour of the motion? Those opposed? The motion is carried with three opposed.

Now, before we go on, I'll maybe ask Rhonda if she would give us some ideas on public input in general.

Ms Sorensen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the main question I was looking to have answered was the extent to which the committee wished to engage the public in this process. With other committees what we have done is advertised for written submissions. In the ad you can specify whether or not you may or may not hold public hearings, and then those making submissions can indicate in their submission if they wish to attend a public hearing.

What I'm hearing around the table is that the committee isn't really looking to go into the public hearing process. However, if you do wish to engage the public in written submissions, we can certainly do advertisements to do that as well as perhaps news releases. I could come back with a more specific communication strategy once I have a better understanding of what the committee's wishes are.

Mr. Campbell: I'd like to put forward a motion that we put out advertisements asking for public submissions in writing and set a date for whatever we see as reasonable.

The Chair: Any discussion on that motion? No discussion? All in favour? Those opposed? The motion is carried. Good. Thank you. Okay. Is there anything else we need to do?

Ms Sorensen: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I was just hoping to also gain a little bit of clarification on whether or not there was a specific deadline in mind for the public submissions. With other committees we've been going mid- to late August, but we need time to do the advertising and allow sufficient time for the public to actually put their submissions together.

The Chair: Well, most definitely that's going to be a concern because, as Ms Blakeman indicated, our timeline is fairly short, and a lot of that's going to depend on when we have our next meeting. I would think we would want to advertise fairly shortly, but we'll have to determine the date of the next meeting to determine when we would need the submissions back.

Ms Sorensen: If I may, Mr. Chair, further to that, what other committees have also done is given permission for the chair and the

deputy chair to approve the content of an ad. That just allows us to speed up the process a little bit.

The Chair: Then I guess, as my colleague here has indicated, maybe we don't necessarily have to have them all in by the next meeting.

Mr. Taylor: In fact, Mr. Chairman, we could review the cross-jurisdictional comparison. We could perhaps hear from some of the technical briefers from Transportation and Solicitor General at the next meeting, and at the subsequent meeting we could consider the public input.

The Chair: Good point.

Mr. Campbell: I would just like some clarification on our timelines being short and what you mean by that. I think that this is an issue that we've got to get right. You know, I think there's going to be a lot of debate on this issue. I think there's going to be a lot of debate between rural and urban. For example, you have the young kids in the urban cities doing their text messaging, but myself living out where I do, where it's an hour to an hour and a half between each community I visit, I'm on my hands-free all the time. I know that there are other people in the rural ridings that are also on a hands-free and the ones that are using hand-held. I think that there's a real division in what's going to happen over this issue. I'm just curious as to our time frame being short. I have some concerns about that.

The Chair: That's a good point. I guess I see our time frame as being short if we want to get it back to the fall session. If we find it's a more complex issue and we need to do more study, then maybe we give a report back saying: "Hey, we need more time. It'll have to come as a new bill in the spring." I don't know.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, I guess the question that I would put to Mr. Campbell would be: how much of that debate – and I don't disagree with the principle of what you're saying – do you think should happen in this committee, and how much should happen on the floor of the Legislature when second reading and further stages of debate resume on this bill, in light of our recommendations? I'm very open myself to whichever way it could go.

Mr. Campbell: I think that we should have some good, serious debate in this committee before we get to the floor. I mean, there's going to be debate on the floor anyways.

Ms Blakeman: It's limited.

Mr. Campbell: Well, it's limited, but it's going to be all used up. I have no doubt that every minute that's allotted to this bill is going to be used up on the floor. I think we have to have good debate in this committee meeting. Personally, you know, I have my own thoughts on it, but I think that the technical information is going to go a long way in determining which way I see myself going on this. I mean, I read what the newspapers say, like we all do, about what's going on out there. In today's world, with technology being what it is, we just don't function without them. It's going to be an interesting conversation and debate on what is the proper way to go.

The Chair: Might I suggest that we proceed with the intent of concluding by October, but if we find that it's more complex than we're anticipating at this point in time, we're free to extend it? We don't have an official deadline.

Mr. Campbell: Okay. That was my concern: about whether or not we had an official deadline.

The Chair: No, we don't.

Mr. Weadick: I think Mr. Taylor probably hit the nail on the head. We're looking at a technical bill to try to make a recommendation back to the House. At the end of the day 72 members that have listened to their constituents and taken . . .

Mr. Taylor: Correction, 83.

Mr. Weadick: Or 83. Sorry; 72 plus 11 constituencies will likely come forward with opinions from what they've heard. I know all of us have been listening to our constituents and probably have a lot more public input already than we're likely to get through any written submissions from the public.

I'm also assuming that people like the Alberta Motor Association and some of them will have some pretty broad-based opinions from the users that they represent. We may see them as group players, but they really represent broad groups of just simple motorists and drivers and maybe some of the trucking industry as well.

I think if we're going to try to do an extended public input session and debate all of that here, the chance of getting back in October is very little to do a meaningful public input session. I mean, yeah, we can ask. I don't mind the process of sending out something and letting a few people write in. The fact that it's written probably gets a lot of people off the agenda right off the bat because of taking the time and the effort to sit down and compose that. A lot of people are too busy. You see them on the street and they give you their input, but it's hard to get written submissions. So I'm a little bit concerned about getting meaningful public input prior to October if this is going forward.

11:50

The Chair: Perhaps if we could have a motion that the Standing Committee on the Economy authorize the chair and deputy chair to approve advertisements on behalf of the committee regarding the review of Bill 204.

Ms Blakeman?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I'll move that.

The Chair: You'll note I didn't put a date in there. We'll discuss that as well.

Ms Blakeman: I noted that.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Those opposed? Motion carried.

I think we should talk about our meeting schedule before we determine a date to have the submissions back in. Would that be fair?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

The Chair: Now, I know everybody likes to take some time off in the summer. I had suggested we have a meeting August 25, but that's only my suggestion. What are the thoughts?

Mr. Marz: How about August 8?

The Chair: Do you want to have an earlier meeting, I guess, two weeks from now?

Mr. Marz: August 8 is a Friday.

Ms Blakeman: The morning of August 8 would be fine. At the same time would be fine.

The Chair: Well, if we can decide on if you want to have an earlier meeting, say within the next three weeks, then perhaps between the deputy chair and me we can consult with everybody on dates, and we can pick a date. Would that be okay?

Mr. Marz: If we have an early one, are we going to have enough information to make it worth while to have a meeting?

The Chair: Well, I would think if we're going to have an early one, we would deal with, as Dave has indicated, the technical area with the submissions from the sponsor and the ministers.

Mr. Marz: And the departments. Yeah. Okay.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think the more important thing is our tolerance on how many people would be missing from a given meeting, which gives assistance to the chair and the deputy chair in trying to select a date. This committee has how many people on it?

The Chair: Eleven.

Ms Blakeman: Eleven. Okay.

The Chair: The quorum is only four, but I would like to see more than four.

Ms Blakeman: Out of the eleven there are three members not from the government. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct.

Ms Blakeman: So I think we need to settle on a number that we would find acceptable to hold a meeting with – in other words, a modified quorum – and I would suggest that at least one if not two members of the opposition parties need to be in attendance at those meetings.

Mr. Weadick: I know that August 25 most of us will be back in Edmonton for an afternoon pair of cabinet policy committee meetings, so I know from that perspective, at least that date, there's probably a good prospect of having a lot of government members in. But I'm not sure about the nongovernment.

Mr. Taylor: I know I'm away for the 25th. I think, as well, that if we're contemplating, Mr. Chair, any form of meaningful public input here, we want to leave ourselves some time to be able to debate that as well, still trying to respect that we're trying to get our recommendations back to the House on this bill in a timely fashion. So I would argue in favour of an earlier August meeting rather than a later August meeting and that we try to get the technical briefing part of the bill out of the way then. I'm very open as to whether it's the 6th or the 8th or whatever the specific date is, but I would suggest that we try and get back together someplace in that first half of August, if that's agreeable.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Chairman, I would agree that we should probably shoot for an early August meeting, and if we look at early September for the next meeting after that, that should give us ample time to review the public input, written submissions. We should probably

be not just looking at the next meeting but the next two meetings in that scheduling so that we can kind of work our schedules around that. I would suggest sometime in the first week in September and probably the first week in August.

The Chair: I'm hearing from what you're saying that you would like to have the submissions back by September 1?

Mr. Marz: Yeah.

The Chair: Perhaps we can agree on that. Does that sound reasonable to everybody?

Mr. Campbell: There are no meetings in August. All the other meetings are cancelled.

The Chair: I realize that the intent is to try and leave August free, but if we can get enough people to have a meeting, I think it would be worth while. Is the consensus that we should try and have a meeting before the end of August? No.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I misunderstood, then, because I thought in asking for the submissions to be in by the beginning of September that we would need to meet once prior to that in order to receive the research information that we have charged Dr. Massolin with. I was fine with the 25th of August. That's toward the end of the month. I'm wondering if that would suit people if we met on Monday the 25th, which might also jive with a possibly cancelled, but possibly not cancelled, government meeting. Maybe that would work for us. That would give us one week prior to the submission deadline.

The Chair: I think most people would be available on the 25th. You're not available?

Mr. Taylor: No. And I'm but one person.

The Chair: There are two for sure. So the 25th is out.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, if I can, there's no absolute requirement that we deal with this in a two-step process. It just means that if we put it off until our next meeting, being sometime in September, we'll have more ground to cover in a shorter period of time. We could still set the deadline for public submissions at August 31 or September 1, whatever, get together sometime in the first half of September – I might as well put it on the record now that I will be away that first week in September as well – and deal with technical briefings and written submissions and just set aside enough time to go through that and then have some debate at a subsequent meeting afterwards.

The Chair: Dr. Massolin.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to offer to the committee that the research staff would be looking for a little bit of direction in terms of the stakeholder list as well in terms of who's on it, who's not. I don't know if we can work directly with you and the deputy chair in that regard or if that necessitates another meeting earlier. I'm not sure.

The Chair: Okay. Let's decide on when we want to have the next meeting, whether we want to have it as early as possible or late into September. There are still two weeks in July if that's acceptable.

Mr. Weadick: For those two periods that we were talking about to match up with CPC, which all of these government members match

up on, the 25th of August and the 15th of September are our two dates, so we'll all be here in the afternoon for those two meeting days. Now, if that works with the opposition members, that would be great because then we could do a morning session knowing we've got fairly significant turnout for both those dates. If you want to go earlier than that in August, it may get a little tougher, but those two are available.

The Chair: I hate to delay everything for two months if we're looking at September 15.

Mr. Weadick: Yeah. We've got the 25th and the 15th or both.

Mr. Taylor: That's a two-part approach.

Mr. Marz: There are four missing on the 25th, so that's out.

Mr. Weadick: You can send an alternate, right?

Mr. Marz: Well, it's going to be pretty hard to find an alternate in August.

Mr. Taylor: However, we have more than quorum if only four are away. We have seven. We have presumably – we don't know about Mr. Mason – two members of the opposition available to attend that meeting.

Ms Blakeman: On the 25th? Yeah.

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps we need to check on that.

The Chair: Can I suggest that I will send out a schedule or a calendar to everybody and ask them to put in their no-good dates and try and pick a date that is acceptable to the most people? Would that be okay?

Mr. Taylor: Sure. That's fine with me.

The Chair: Okay. We'll try and expedite it. Maybe we can even have it before the end of July.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Chair, if we're looking at before the end of July, the 28th and 29th would be okay with me. Just to put it out there. Also, to echo the good doctor's comments, I'd like to give you, Mr. Chair, permission to move forward with respect to the stakeholder list so that we don't have to wait a month to look at a list and then decide who we want input from. I would like, if we need to put a motion forward, to give you the authority to move forward with respect to a stakeholders list and invite submissions.

12:00

The Chair: Okay. Firstly, I'd like a motion that the chair be delegated to canvass the membership to come up with a suitable meeting date, hopefully in the next month.

Mr. Marz: I'll move that.

The Chair: So moved. Any discussion? All in favour? Those opposed? Motion carried. Okay, we'll do that.

Now, on the stakeholders list. Maybe just make that motion, Manmeet.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, I'd make a motion to give Mr. Chair and the deputy chair the authority to move forward to determine from the

stakeholders list that the doctor provides who we would like submissions from and then invite those submissions.

The Chair: Okay. Just on that, before we move on the motion, I'd like anybody that has any burning desire to put forward a stakeholder name to do that.

Ms Blakeman: This may end up being more of an interview situation than a request for submission, but one of the things that I'd be interested in knowing is information from installers of the hands-free devices because that's a piece of information I think we need to know in the committee; for example, if hands-free devices are particularly costly to install in a given kind of vehicle or older than a certain year. What I'm trying to not do is have us eventually end up putting through a recommendation for law which would then subject a certain kind of person or purchasers of certain vehicles or people driving older vehicles to a considerable amount of money in order to achieve a hands-free situation, so I'm wondering if it's possible to interview installers. I know in Edmonton Certified Radio, for example, does a lot of that work. I don't know that it's so much a submission, but it is information that I'm seeking in order to make some sort of factual, research-based decisions.

Mr. Marz: On that same line of thinking some automakers such as General Motors with their OnStar have them installed in certain vehicles that they already have in the lot, and there are several out there. So I think we've got to be a little careful making recommendations perhaps, again, on something that already exists out there at huge expense such as OnStar in these vehicles. I don't know if we want to hear from somebody along those lines or not.

The Chair: The GM dealerships maybe?

Mr. Marz: Yeah.

The Chair: Well, those are all ideas.
Anybody else have any thoughts? Manmeet.

Mr. Bhullar: Yeah. Mr. Chair, I'd like to – and, again, the written part may be a bit of issue here. There are a lot of professional drivers out there. I've been in consultation with many of them already: taxi drivers and truck drivers, couriers, and the like. It may be a bit difficult to get written submissions from them. Perhaps just as a committee and as individuals with membership on this committee it may be worth while for us to solicit their input just because of the fact that I think, in my opinion and in my experience in the past, it's been rather difficult sometimes to get written submissions from some individuals within these professions.

The Chair: Yeah. We can all talk to different people in the next month or so. If we have somebody we want to add, I think we can bring it forward and discuss it.

Mr. Weadick: I was just going to say that many of these types of businesses rely on communication. Whether it's the old microphone CB radio type or whether it's cellphone technology, their actual ability to be in business depends on their ability to communicate with dispatches. So we're going to have to probably find out about emergency vehicles dealing with dispatch, all those kinds of things that can be impacted by the legislation that's proposed.

The Chair: Okay. The motion is that
the chair and the deputy chair be delegated to liaise with Dr. Massolin on the stakeholder list.

Is that generally what you said? Any further discussion? All in favour? Those opposed? The motion is carried.

Anything I've missed? Okay. Any other business?

Okay. The next meeting will be at the call of the chair. I will circulate to everyone today and get your bad dates in the next month or so, and we'll set up a date that's most convenient to everybody.

Mr. Marz: I'll give you mine right now.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Campbell: Maybe just one comment on the meeting dates. I mean, I understand that, you know, we have two or three opposition people on the committee, but quorum is quorum. While it's important that we – and we're all going to debate this. I don't think this is an issue that goes down party lines by any means, but I think it's important that we don't delay this because of those issues. I mean, if we have eight people or seven people for quorum, then I think we meet. We've got to get on the with business.

The Chair: But to be fair, I would like to not exclude the opposition members.

Mr. Campbell: No, I understand that. But also, I mean, the thing is that with our schedules we'll be in October, November by the time we get to a meeting where everybody can be here if we're not careful. If we want to get this on the agenda and get it going, then we have to get the work done.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. But you have to have a commitment to that because there is an overwhelming majority with the government members right now. And if it always suits the timing and the schedules of the government majority, then this is not an all-party committee, and now we're into a different cup of tea here. That's why I ask that there is consideration given to the minority parties here.

Mr. Campbell: Well, I understand that.

Ms Blakeman: We don't work on the same schedule, and I disagree with you that the committee should give instructions to the chair and the vice-chair to go ahead with a meeting as long as there are seven people. I think we need to be careful to include members of the minority parties here.

The Chair: And I'm sure they will. Otherwise Dave will beat me to a pulp.

Mr. Taylor: I'm not that tough a guy.

The Chair: Okay. If there is no further business, could we have a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Taylor: So moved.

The Chair: All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 12:06 p.m.]

