

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 5, 1997**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 97/05/05

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. I'd just ask those people who are not yet in their seats to do so at their earliest convenience.

Chairman's Ruling

Designation of a Department's Estimates

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, last Thursday the Opposition House Leader raised a point of order during Committee of Supply concerning whether a department designated by the Leader of the Official Opposition for consideration by the Committee of Supply on a Thursday pursuant to Standing Order 58(4) must be considered by the entire Committee of Supply rather than by just a subcommittee. The Chair was not prepared to rule on this point of order at that time as the issue was quite complicated. The subcommittees of supply did, however, meet to consider the estimates of the departments of Education and Community Development. In deferring ruling on the matter, the Chair stated that the proceedings that occurred on Thursday afternoon would not constitute a precedent.

It is unfortunate that this point of order was not raised earlier. Pursuant to paragraph 321 of *Beauchesne*, "A point of order against procedure must be raised promptly," it would have been more conducive to the business of the House if the point of order had come up earlier last week.

To the Chair's knowledge this is the first time this question has been the subject of a point of order, as last year the Official Opposition did not designate any departments for consideration by the Committee of Supply when subcommittees were meeting. This issue had not arisen prior to that time as before last year subcommittees of supply had not been called since 1979.

What is now Standing Order 58(4) was incorporated into the Standing Orders in 1982. The Chair would like to review Standing Order 58(4), which says:

The Leader of the Official Opposition may, during the period when the estimates referred to in suborders (1) and (2) are under consideration by the Committee of Supply, by written notice to the Clerk prior to 4 p.m. on a Monday, designate one department's estimates to be considered by the committee on the following Thursday.

Standing Order 57 allows the Committee of Supply to establish subcommittees, which was accomplished when the Committee of Supply passed Government Motion 13 with amendments on Wednesday, April 23, 1997. The Chair also refers members to Standing Order 57(3), which states that the Committee of Supply may refer any portion of the estimates "to one of its subcommittees for that subcommittee's report."

There appears, then, to be an ambiguity in the Standing Orders as to how these two Standing Orders interface with one another. The Chair is the servant of the House and must apply the rules as the Assembly prescribes them in the Standing Orders. Practically speaking, the issue will not arise again this session as subcommittees of supply will not be called again on a Thursday. Accordingly, the Chair recommends that this issue be discussed between House leaders before the next budget cycle, and if they are unable

to recommend amendments to the Standing Orders to rectify this ambiguity, the Speaker may be asked to give a ruling at that time.

MR. HAVELOCK: What's your name: Bob and Weave?

THE CHAIRMAN: Duck and swim. Hon. Government House Leader, it would appear that it is a duck-and-swim kind of ruling, but in actual fact what you've got is two different Standing Orders that appear to not be capable of one showing superiority over the other. Because these are drawn up in concert between the House leaders, the Chair is advising the House leaders to look at it, and if they don't, then the Speaker will make a ruling before the next budget cycle in the following year.

The Committee of Supply is reminded that tonight we have under consideration in subcommittee D the main estimates of science, research, and information technology and in subcommittee C Public Works, Supply and Services' main estimates for the year 1997-98. All those who are in subcommittee C will now go to room 512, and subcommittee D will meet here.

Before we break off, I have a signal from the Government House Leader that he would like to say something, hopefully not on the ruling.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Chairman, I was just wondering. In the sorry event that we aren't able to work this out between House leaders, would the Chair and/or the Speaker be prepared to provide a ruling before we get into the next estimates round so that we know what we're facing?

THE CHAIRMAN: You're asking about the timing. This will not occur until the next budget cycle, which is next year, and the Speaker will make a ruling on it if the House leaders are not able to make an agreement as to how that should take place.

MR. HAVELOCK: And that ruling will be given before the next estimates? That's the question I'm asking.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The subcommittees now are invited to repair to their separate chambers, and we'll commence with subcommittee estimates.

[The committee met as subcommittees C and D from 8:10 p.m. to 10:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee C of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee D of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the department of science, research, and information technology, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the departments of science, research, and information technology, and Public Works, Supply and Services, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table copies of a ruling given during Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Third Reading**

Bill 7
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise, albeit very briefly, to continue and perhaps conclude our debate on Bill 7, that being the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1997. In sort of summarizing some of the comments that have been made over the last week and a half of very excellent debate, I was struck by a number of things that I'd just like to remind the House of. One was the debate in particular that took place between myself and the hon. Provincial Treasurer, wherein we dissected this particular Bill . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry to interrupt the hon. member. It would appear that no one has yet moved this motion.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: I did want to do it, but . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 7.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: There you go. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

10:20

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader. Now that we're back on track, I was talking about how the Provincial Treasurer was responding to some of the comments that I had made with regard to this entire process of interim supply Bills and other instruments of government which from time to time we have seen in this House and I'm sure will continue to see. There are interim supply Bills, there are the supplementary supplies, there are the special warrants that come up from time to time, and then there are special orders in council and a number of other instruments, as the Treasurer called them.

However, I was particularly struck by a couple of things here, first of all the lack of breakdown which this Bill is an example of. There is no detail here, but I did ask the Provincial Treasurer during debate about that very point plus a number of other explanations, such as measures of performance and outputs and some meaningful extensions to the numbers that would sort of explain, particularly to new members, what it is that the government is up to when they introduce an appropriation Bill like this. I was particularly struck by the fact that the Provincial Treasurer has given an undertaking, if I recall correctly, to in fact ensure that from now on when government does set about to introduce an appropriation Bill such as this or some other form of request for moneys, a couple of things will happen. First of all, that type of a Bill will from now on be accompanied by some greater detailed breakdown. I note that the Provincial Treasurer did provide me with a copy of some additional information in relation to these one-liners that appear in Bill 7, so that's good.

The second thing I'm struck by is that by the Provincial Treasurer's own admission more and more information has to come before what I think he called the broader Assembly for greater openness and greater accountability. So through this debate over the last couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, in particular with Bill 7 and prior to that Bill 6, which was another request for moneys, I think perhaps we have now accomplished at least something very, very positive by way of an admission on the part of the government that there is a need to explain things in a little more detail, particularly so because we have a huge amount of money we're dealing with here. In this particular case we're dealing with something like 33 percent of the total budget, or something approximating that amount anyway. So I'm pleased with that.

Nonetheless, I think Albertans and members of this House still do need some additional assurances from the government that these moneys that are being requested hereunder are indeed going to be used for the purposes intended. We all heard things at the doors, Mr. Speaker, which we know require additional moneys in the areas of health care, education, justice, advanced education, the environment, science and research, wherever. So there's an opportunity through this Bill for the government then to exercise and make good on those promises they made at the doors and the complaints we were all hearing about secrecy in government and perhaps even some of the cynicism that surrounds the entire business of governance.

So we understand and we will support – at least most of us, I think, will support – this supply Bill going through at this stage because we don't want government to grind to a halt, as we've said earlier. It's an awkward spot to be in, private members and members of the opposition, because you're kind of darned if you do and you're darned if you don't. If you don't support this

particular Bill, then of course it comes spinning back at you that you're against expenditures in health care and education and so on. Yet if you do support the Bill, then you're caught in that squeeze of saying: well, how can you pass a Bill which, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora said, is only six pages long and one of the pages is virtually empty? There's not enough explanation there. But I will hold the Treasurer and consequently the entire government to the commitment undertaken in this House last week when the Provincial Treasurer did say that there would be greater accountability. By that he meant further elaborations in any future requests forthcoming. I think that heralds a victory for those of us who have fought on that point for the last four years. We'll certainly be keeping a very watchful eye, and hopefully I'll have both eyes working very soon.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up and conclude here by

saying that we will be watching very carefully in all of these areas to make sure that these appropriations named in this Bill do go to those areas intended, that the moneys are properly spent where they are most required, and that the government does bring more and more things in an open fashion to this House for proper debate so that there is no chance of further accusations of secrecy and decisions having been made behind closed doors without public scrutiny, allowing this opposition to do its very demanding job of holding this government accountable.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to conclude my brief comments on third reading in relation to Bill 7. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

[At 10:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

