

## Standing Committee on Private Bills

10:08 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Renner]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order. This is the organizational meeting for the Private Bills Committee. I think before we get started, just because everyone is relatively new and we need to have a good working relationship with everyone, I'd like to have a self-introduction of members of this committee. So we'll just go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves. Maybe start with Mr. Wickman at this end.

MR. WICKMAN: Percy Wickman, Edmonton-Rutherford.

MRS. GORDON: Judy Gordon, Lacombe-Stettler.

MR. JACQUES: Wayne Jacques, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MS LEIBOVICI: Karen Leibovici, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Duco Van Binsbergen, West Yellowhead.

MR. BENIUK: Andrew Beniuk, Edmonton-Norwood.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Lorne Taylor, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

MR. HLADY: Mark Hlady, Calgary-Mountain View.

MRS. SOETAERT: Colleen Soetaert, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. SEKULIC: Peter Sekulic, Edmonton-Manning.

MR. AMERY: Moe Amery, Calgary-East.

MR. FISCHER: Butch Fischer, Wainwright.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Julius Yankowsky, Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MRS. FRITZ: Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross.

MRS. LAING: Bonnie Laing, Calgary-Bow.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. My name is Rob Renner. I'm the MLA for Medicine Hat, and I'll be chairing this committee this year. I'd also like at this time to introduce our deputy chairman, Moe Amery. Moe will be chairing the meeting in my absence. Hopefully it won't be very often that I have to miss this interesting meeting, but I'm sure that Moe will do a terrific job if I'm not able to be here.

I'd also like to introduce the staff that we'll have working for us this year. Mr. Frank Work is the senior Parliamentary Counsel. Most of you have probably met Frank. Rob Reynolds is Parliamentary Counsel, and Rob will be actually spending a good deal of time with us. Our administrative assistant is Florence Marston.

I went over the list of membership on this committee, and it appears to me, and certainly correct me if I'm wrong, that most if not all of the members will be new to this committee. Many are new to the Legislature.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Excuse me; you missed Bonnie. Bonnie's been here before.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bonnie. I'm sorry. Yes.

MRS. LAING: I was the former chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bonnie was the former chairman, yes.

MR. HLADY: And Mr. Fischer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What I would like to do is just give a very brief recap of the purpose of this committee so everyone knows why you're here and why we're all here.

Private Bills is somewhat confusing. It certainly was to me when I started to read the material and prepare myself for this meeting. The confusion is that there are private members' Bills, which we have all been dealing with in the Legislature already. We also have private Bills, and this committee deals with private Bills as opposed to private members' Bills. These Bills originate from the general public. Someone will petition the Legislature to pass a Bill on their behalf, and then the Legislature will refer that petition to our committee for our consideration. These are Bills that do not generally affect the population of Alberta on a wide-scope basis such as a school Act or even the private members' Bills, where if they are passed, they will affect the general population.

The Bills that we will be dealing with are Bills that are very specific to individuals or individual groups. You'll notice on some of the Bills we have in front of us this year that they deal with adult adoptions, they deal with private educational facilities, private insurance companies, and there's also one on our list for a medical foundation. So that's the kind of organization that we'll be dealing with over the year.

I think it will be a very interesting year. We have a lot of work cut out for us. As you all are very much aware, I'm sure, the spring sitting of the Legislature was extremely short. As a result, a number of the Bills that we have before us this year are holdovers from last year, Bills that there was not time for the committee to get through before the Legislature adjourned. So we have a large number of Bills to cover in a relatively short period of time. Throughout the year it will be my responsibility to make sure that we have good, thorough discussion on all these Bills, but we don't want to let ourselves get sidetracked and come to the position where we run out of time and again don't have time to consider all of the Bills. We'll be watching that fairly closely.

The meetings themselves will be relatively informal. There are a couple of reasons for that, the main reason being that we are dealing to a large extent with people who are not familiar with the surroundings of the Legislature. The people who are petitioning us to pass their Bills are not totally familiar with the rules of etiquette and everything else in the Legislature. So with your permission I would like to refer to members of this committee by name rather than by constituency. I think it makes a much more personal atmosphere for the witnesses that will be here, and I think it's much less of a strange situation for someone to walk into. So we'll refer to individuals by names, and I would like to keep the discussion as informal as possible. There is not a restriction on the number of times that any member may speak on one particular issue, but I would remind you again to try and keep your comments as brief as possible because we do want to get through a large number of Bills.

I would like, however, that you address your comments through the chair. I will attempt to keep a list up here of people's names who would wish to speak, and I will call your name once you're on the list. Just catch my eye, I'll get your name on the list, and everyone

will certainly have ample opportunity to speak. It'll keep the meetings much more civil if we are all working through the chair, and it makes things work much easier.

There also will be occasions throughout the term when it will be necessary for our committee to go in camera. In order for the people in *Hansard* to have an idea exactly when we're going in camera when we're not in camera, I would request that a member make a motion that the committee go in camera for discussion. A lot of these Bills will be of a personal nature and some of the questions may be of a personal nature, and it may be necessary for us to be in camera during those discussion. So if you wish the discussion to go in camera, please make a motion through the chair. The committee will vote on that motion. We can go in camera. When we come out of camera, again please make a motion so we come back on the record, so that the people in *Hansard* again will know that we are about to go back on the record.

Really, that's all that I have from an informational point of view. I've done a fair amount of reading on the material and the committee. If anyone has any questions of a procedural nature, certainly either bring them up now or talk to me after the meeting, and we can go over those with you.

MR. WICKMAN: I've got two, Mr. Chairman. The first one: is it customary for the applicant or persons objecting to the application to make a presentation?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, it is.

MR. WICKMAN: Customary with everyone that they make presentation?

MR. CHAIRMAN: They can make a presentation in person or in writing, preferably in person so that we have an opportunity to question them. Part of the process of these Bills is that they petition the Legislature to consider their Bill, but it's also necessary that they advertise the Bill both in the *Gazette* and in a local newspaper. That's the exact reason, so that anyone who has objections or input that they wish to have towards the Bill has an opportunity to come before our committee.

MR. WICKMAN: But is there a tradition . . . For example, in the recommendation from the Parliamentary Counsel where they rate the Bill as "simple," is that like rubber-stamping it? There's no complexity; there are no issues that we should really be concerned about?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think I'll have Parliamentary Counsel address that.

MR. WORK: That rating that we give to the Bill is primarily -- the point's well-taken. Is it a rubber-stamping? The answer is no. The only reason for that rating is basically to enable the committee to schedule the petitions. In other words, if it seems to Parliamentary Counsel that a particular petition has raised a great deal of controversy and there are a lot of people that want to speak to it, we might rate it as "complex," and that way it can be given a block of time where a lot of people could be heard. When we rate something as "simple," it doesn't necessarily mean that it should be rubber-stamped. It just means that either there isn't a lot of opposition or the issue is pretty straightforward, and it could therefore be allotted a shorter period of time. That's the only purpose of those. It's just to assist the committee in allotting the time for hearings.

MR. WICKMAN: Is there a time restriction on people making presentations?

MR. WORK: Not unless the committee wants. That's largely up to the committee. Again, we try to suggest to the committee a schedule that will allow them a reasonable amount of time to deal with everyone. If the committee wants to impose time limits, it's up to the committee.

MR. WICKMAN: Does this committee meet every week?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, the committee will be meeting every week. I was going to bring it up a little bit later in the agenda, but we can certainly bring it up now. Traditionally, this committee has met from 10 till noon every Wednesday, but with the new structure and the reforms that are in place, with moving up the starting time for the afternoon sitting, we will be proposing that the committee meet instead from 9 to 11 every Tuesday. So tentatively our next committee meeting would be next Tuesday at 9 o'clock in the morning.

MR. WICKMAN: I'd just point out that from our point of view we have conflict, under the new rules in particular, with caucus sessions and such. Looking at it from the point of view of accessibility by the public, evening hours are normally better. Has it ever been considered, say, looking at a Thursday evening? No? Nobody wants that. Yeah. You see, I'm from Edmonton. I keep forgetting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions on procedure?

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, just in terms of the timing, 9 o'clock is difficult for me. I've got a standing 9 o'clock meeting every morning, and 9:30 would be better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we can perhaps deal with that at a later date. We've got a problem no matter where we go, I'm afraid.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Would it not be possible just to continue -- everybody seems to be here this morning at 10 o'clock. Would it not be possible to use that time slot, from 10 to 11, every Wednesday?

MRS. SOETAERT: That's our caucus meeting every Wednesday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. I think we have problems with caucus meetings at 11 o'clock.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You don't feel that 10 to 11 is enough?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. We have two-hour meetings, and we'll be pushing to have everything done in two hours. That's why we moved the time up to 9 o'clock.

Mrs. Laing.

MRS. LAING: I was just going to say that one hour would not be sufficient, especially when you have delegations. You need at least the full two hours. So I don't know. Perhaps we'd have to make exceptions for the hon. member to come in late, but I really feel we need the two hours.

MS LEIBOVICI: If that's okay, I can probably be here by 9:30 or close to it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we can probably work around that.

If it's all right with the committee, I would ask that we go into an in camera session to review the Bills that we have before us and come up with a tentative schedule for these Bills. Could I have a motion, then, that we go in camera?

Ms Leibovici.

MS LEIBOVICI: I move that we go in camera.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Ms Leibovici that we go in camera. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? None opposed. Carried.

[The committee met in camera from 10:22 a.m. till 10:55 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've had the discussion on the order. If someone would move, then, that the circulated order of petitions as amended will be the recommended order. Mrs. Fritz. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? None opposed.

I would also like to indicate that our next committee meeting, then, will be in this room at 9 a.m. on Tuesday. What is the date of that? The 21st; it's on the list. Tuesday, September 21, 9 a.m., and we'll be dealing with the first three Bills at that time.

Thank you very much.

MR. WORK: Can I have a couple more words?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. WORK: I just asked the chairman if I could have your ears for another second, just to let you know how the process is going to work. When you come in for the hearings, we'll put the petitioners over there so they have the benefit of the sound system. We swear them, and certainly if they perjure themselves in front of the committee, it would be a breach of privilege of Parliament, and they could be sanctioned. I don't seriously believe anyone would do that; I'm just putting it in context for you. They do get sworn to tell the truth. They'll be terrified, sitting there facing you, for the most part. Maybe some of the lawyers who are used to court won't be, but the average petitioners are going to be terrified. I would just suggest that you bear that in mind when you ask them questions. You know, make it simple. I'm not saying these are ignorant people; they're just going to be scared.

MR. HLADY: Would it be simpler if we were dressed more casually, without a tie or something, if we have a choice, if there is no problem with this? I'm just trying to ease the tension if at all possible.

MR. WORK: Decorum and order is up to the chair.

If I can offer one thing. Last time in the committee the chairman had the members introduce themselves to the petitioners. The way in which you do that -- you know, like, "Mark Hladý; hi, sir," something like that -- sometimes helps. It's just a suggestion, but the chairman last time did that, and it maybe helped to ease the anguish a bit.

MR. JACQUES: Is it possible, again for the ease of the people that are appearing here, and not so much the lawyers but the average

person in front us, that we have something that says, you know, Judy Gordon, Wayne Jacques? Something so that when they look at this, they can kind of make a little bit of an attachment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think it's a good idea. It would help the chairman a lot too. Let me take that under advisement, and we'll see if we can come up with something for the next meeting.

MR. WORK: We do do that for the petitioners. We put their names in front of them so you know who to address.

The other thing was that I was just going to quickly say that the schedule is . . . We have to get these things into the committee -- like, the House has to commit them to you -- and we've got to do that before Tuesday. Because of the change in schedule we had to move the meeting up, as the chairman said, so it's going to be really fast. The chairman's going to present the petitions to the Assembly this afternoon. He just reads them off, and tomorrow he'll ask that they be read and received.

All the Bills will have to go on notice this afternoon. They'll be introduced Monday. We'll give each of you who are sponsoring a Bill a script for Monday so that you can stand up and introduce your Bill, because we can't get it into the committee until it's been introduced. It can't be introduced until it has gone on notice, and they can't go on notice until they've been presented and read and received. So in the next four days you're going to see a lot of private Bill stuff, a flurry of it, and then Tuesday, once all the Bills are introduced on Monday and committed to the committee, the heat's off and they're all in the committee's hands.

MRS. SOETAERT: I was just saying -- I hate to use Florence -- if Florence had a picture of all of us on this committee, maybe that would work to give to those people.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'd distribute that as well. Good idea.

MR. HLADY: Will we be presenting on Monday in the order that they are here or in the numbered order?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, in the order that they appear.

Okay. If there are no further questions, then, could I have a motion to adjourn. A whole bunch of them. Mrs. Laing. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? None. Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 11:01 a.m.]

