

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections,
Standing Orders and Printing

Monday, March 22, 1982

Chairman: Mr. Payne

7:35 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call to order this meeting of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. That's a mouthful. Perhaps it might be appropriate at the outset to confirm that each of you has received from the secretary of the committee a photocopy of the motion that's before the committee. One has been photocopied on three separate pages and is a little more convenient to work with than Votes and Proceedings or an Order Paper. Is there any member of the committee who does not have this photocopied version? Good.

I appreciate that members of the committee will probably want to benefit from this evening's experience before commenting in any detail on the question of scheduling. But as chairman, I would appreciate at least a preliminary indication from the members of the committee as to their preferences with respect to the days or dates that the committee sits and with respect to the starting and adjournment time on each of those occasions. I hasten to add that your chairman is under some constraint in that the motion for referral, as members will recall, calls for a report back to the Legislature from this committee by Friday, April 2. If in fact, as I anticipate, the report will take me a couple of days to prepare, then really we're looking at sitting days of March 22 through 25, and 29 and 30: a total of six possible sitting days. Again, I appreciate that members would like the benefit of this evening's committee deliberations before they make any final determinations. But for some scheduling needs that the secretary and I have, I would welcome at this time any views or feelings with respect to the days we sit and the times we sit on those occasions.

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman, wasn't there a suggestion at the outset that we would just sit each successive day from today, or was that only . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: That suggestion might have been made, but I don't believe it's been made in any official way, certainly not in the context of a privileges and elections committee meeting. Can I take it that that's an endorsement from you as to sitting each weekday evening until the committee has concluded its work?

MR. PAHL: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I recommend that we sit Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, providing the House business can accommodate it, which I guess it can.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, I was going to suggest, for a start at least, that we look at the evenings that we would normally be sitting in the House, which are Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. But it may be that Wednesday has to be considered, in light of the time constraints. I'm just not sure what kind of progress we're going to make. Obviously this is just a preliminary discussion, but I'd like to see us set something for this week, judge our progress, and then possibly make some further arrangements for the following week.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as you're an important variable in this and subsequent discussions, do you have a comment to make with respect to scheduling?

MR. R. SPEAKER: Wednesday is taken this week, I understand, so most likely Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings would be the best times. I'm not sure what the duration of the meetings would be either. I was going to suggest the hour before session, 7 to 8, if we have night sessions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I could express my own personal view, but frankly I feel as if I'm in the hands of the committee with respect to the question of the time. Some have indicated perhaps a 7:30 start and a two-hour or so duration on each occasion, but I have no strong personal views.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Maybe I could just say this, and it will help a little. Mr. Chairman, in terms of the discussion, what I'm having trouble with, is the position of our caucus and the other members of the opposition. We really haven't asked for any rule changes. We think things are great the way they are. I see the present budget before us taking a normal time, nothing abnormal. I see no cause for alarm in terms of the spring session. Last year, the fall session, maybe we had a unique experience, and maybe it will occur relatively seldom. Who knows? But that was the first time in 19 years I've been here that something like that happened. And now there is \$12 billion there, so maybe we do need the time.

Really, I'm saying it as politely as I can. I think the government is overreacting in wanting to put in these kinds of restrictive rules. In tonight's discussion, I really haven't got any flexibility in terms of negotiating or saying, look, I can half agree with that or can't agree with that, or I can agree with this clause and not the other one. My terms of reference are: no changes.

So I'm having a tough time: one, with the discussion we're going to have tonight; two, advising you on the scheduling.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I appreciate that difficulty, Mr. Speaker, and certainly it's a difficulty that is shared by other members of the committee. I'm not anxious to prolong the discussion of that point, but Mr. Gogo, if you want to make a comment?

MR. GOGO: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I certainly agree with the Member for Three Hills that, in view of this week, plans have been made. I agree with Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, in view of the fact plans have been made by certain members. As to hours, I would recommend your suggestion, if it was a suggestion, of 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I appreciate we haven't had a great number of members participate, but if I could perhaps summarize this initial consensus. The committee, if it requires the time, will meet this week: tonight, Tuesday, and Thursday evening, from 7:30 to 9:30. But that's strictly a tentative schedule, and the Chair will certainly be open to any qualifying or redirecting instruction from the committee, perhaps at the end of this evening's deliberation.

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman. I was going to suggest that perhaps that option may be well advised for Tuesday night as well, and we'll take another look at Wednesday. Although there are some commitments, it may be something we can overcome, if necessary.

MR. COOK: Mr. Chairman, I know the opposition has expressed a real interest in debating this point and asked for the select committee to meet and discuss this matter. It's been on the Order Paper for some three weeks. I know that all hon. members here would have had a lot of time to do the necessary research or consulting of caucuses. So I'm not sure we should be bound by an arbitrary 9:30 deadline for adjournment each night. I think we should just play it as we go and maybe have 9:30 in mind, but certainly not be bound by that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I certainly didn't indicate any arbitrariness, I thought, with my use of the word "tentative". But please accept it as a tentative recommendation from the Chair, based on an initial consensus.

With that digression with respect to scheduling, perhaps it would now be appropriate for the members of the committee to turn their attention to the motion that has been referred to the committee, Motion No. 1. I have given some thought as to the most effective way for the committee to debate this motion, to discuss it, to exchange views. It seems to me that perhaps the most appropriate way we could do that would be, on this initial occasion, to treat it more or less as a comparatively -- I won't use the word unstructured -- loose discussion. That is, members should feel free to comment on any part of the motion, as opposed to a more rigid or more structured approach where we would take one section at a time. The latter approach might appear to be more appropriate as things transpire, but for the time being it seems more appropriate to me that we just treat it in the more open fashion.

With that, I would now like to open the committee discussion this evening to viewpoints from any members who feel a need or a desire to comment on the motion that's before the committee.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, just for clarification, do you suggest that we go at A through I in a very informal manner or go anywhere in the motion at all?

MR. CHAIRMAN: My own predisposition, subject to change of direction from the committee, is to approach it from any section that attracts the members' interest.

MR. R. SPEAKER: [Inaudible] reject it and go home. Mr. Chairman, I also move that we reject the presentation made to us, and we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have our first motion this evening, from Mr. Speaker.

MR. PAHL: Speaking to the motion, I think at the heart of the issue is whether these rule changes serve the institution and the people of Alberta in terms of our obligation to them. Mr. Chairman, after having sat through what I would think is a very good example of perhaps why there needs to be some time management -- I feel that the duty of an opposition is certainly to oppose and to present its alternatives, but I don't think that an argument particularly improves with repetition. The prospect of managing the time in the Legislature so that ministers can carry on with departmental responsibilities and MLAs can do the very important jobs they have in their constituencies, providing the right balance between time in the Legislature and time in the constituency, I'm afraid I differ with my colleague from Little Bow. I would express the contrary view, that his motion be defeated. If there is no debate, beyond that I would certainly be prepared to move the other motion that would not inspire any debate, and to say that we proceed.

Obviously our caucus has spent a good deal of time on this and has given it the type of consideration I think it deserves.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comment with respect to Mr. Speaker's motion?

MR. MACK: Mr. Chairman, I have given this particular matter of business a fair amount of thought and consideration, particularly in light of the fall session, the amount of time spent in the fall session and the benefits derived therefrom; more importantly, the considerations of parliamentary responsibility, and to ensure that the citizens were well served and the matters coming before this Legislature, which affects them very profoundly, are well aired, well debated, and fully considered.

In doing some research on the debates that went on last fall, I believe there is a clear indication as to whether the debates were, in fact, carried on for the benefit of the citizens and the Legislature or were they perhaps for ulterior motives. I'm not prepared to apply a definitive motive of why they were, but I think it's clear that much of the debate requested very specific, detailed information on a repetitive basis, as my colleague from Mill Woods indicated.

I asked myself the question, when one would consider that we must ensure that adequate debate is allowed and adequate debate takes place so that all views are considered, appreciated, and heard. In fact, this was the case. There was no deliberate attempt to dampen or deafen the ear of the constituent and those whom we serve. Having made that assessment and analysis based on the activity of the Legislature, I, with respect, would vote against the motion that we do not need rule changes. I believe we do need rule changes, and I believe the public would applaud us for doing it, provided it is done with adequate room for debate. I think we do have that. There is a difference between adequate room for debate and a deliberate attempt to stall parliamentary procedure.

* Thank you.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, I'll make my remarks relatively brief. I would also oppose the motion by the Leader of the Opposition. I feel at any time that the rules of the House have one requirement and that's to expedite business. True, at all times we've got to ensure that there is proper and complete debate on issues. But as far as the constituents of Calgary Currie are concerned, they want to ensure that we are not sitting here doing nothing or repeating arguments, but rather are in a position to move swiftly and thoroughly through the business and then proceed with the problems that are facing Alberta today.

I have certain specific things I might personally consider changes to in this document: perhaps the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier need two hours instead of 90 minutes to speak; perhaps 25 days on Committee of Supply is too generous and we need 20. Those are things that I think we can discuss over the next few days. But in general, I think we now have to look at these rules, which are reasonably taken in most legislatures and parliaments in the British system, as a province that has a good number of difficulties to deal with, like all others, and that has the responsibility of being efficient as well as thorough and just.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, I think I'm the last one who would ever want to get technical with regard to the rules. My attention is really directed to Section H, because I just assume that motions to adjourn are not debatable and here we've been debating it. Maybe indirectly I'm asking for a ruling. I wanted to speak to a specific, and here's this motion to adjourn, which I really don't think is debatable. We probably should have called the question some time ago. I guess I'd like your guidance. I'd like to speak to a specific issue, but I'll take your guidance if you insist I speak to the motion to adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before the chairman feels qualified to give such guidance, he will turn to his adviser.

The Chair apologizes for that delay. He is advised that because the motion is not a simple adjournment motion, it is debatable. We've now heard from several members of the committee with respect to Mr. Speaker's motion. Are there any others who wish to participate before I call the question?

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, because of what you said, I gladly wish to participate now in opposing, essentially, what Mr. Speaker has proposed. Members of this committee have been in possession of this motion for some time. I think they clearly recognize the need to address the question of rules of the House. For my part, looking at the number of days, the 25 days and so on, I think it's essential in the interests of government . . . I'm not a member of the Executive Council, but I presume they have things they have to do. I'd like to see us get on with changing the rules. I'm not saying that what's in front of me is totally satisfactory. The Member for Calgary Currie raised a point, and I'm quite interested in hearing that point of view.

On that basis, I would oppose the motion by the hon. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Little Bow, that we adjourn.

DR. PAPROSKI: Mr. Chairman, I too oppose the motion made by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury -- Little Bow rather. I'm sorry. I wouldn't want in any way to make that mistake. I feel that the motion to change the orders has an element of fairness to it that has to be explained fully. We haven't had the opportunity to debate or discuss that. I think it should assure that there is nothing unusual in that particular rule change motion. I don't think there is anything unusual, as compared to other parliaments. Furthermore the ability to adequately debate a budget -- or, in this case, also the Heritage Savings Trust Fund -- is there. It's ample, based on historical activity of this House and other Houses. I think we should defeat that particular motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments before I call for the question?

MR. R. SPEAKER: Just a couple of comments. Time management: certainly I can see the argument, but we see it as time constraint and shutting us off. Last fall, we did something unique that we felt -- we can both debate what the benefits were. But one of the things I found out from that debate was that more Albertans knew something about the heritage fund than they knew prior to that debate. It focussed the issue. It raised the matter. That's part of the debate that goes on in the Legislature. All these years I've sat around here and spent hours and hours asking questions on the estimates. When I go home I find that my constituents say, where were you? Where have you been? In Ottawa? But last fall they knew I was in Edmonton, and they knew what the subject was. They could repeat the arguments. That was one of the most effective times this Legislature has worked. We as members should recognize that:

Certainly if you take the tally in terms of political brownie points, I think we in the opposition gained a few. That's part of give and take in government. On the other hand, the government has time to issue a budget, has total determination of what the programs in the Heritage Savings Trust Fund are. If they meet the needs of the people and put out the right kinds of programs, they will score more brownie points than the opposition does. But limiting debate to the dull, how many pencils are in six pencil boxes type of question, just sterilizes the whole thing. That's why we're saying, give the Legislature a chance to work; don't put time constraints on it. That's how I see that practical experience that went on. As much as some of you feel sensitive about what happened, it was a good experience in terms of the

Legislature involving itself with the people of Alberta. We need more of that kind of thing. It's healthy for the democratic process.

When I say they thought we were in Ottawa or they didn't know we were in Edmonton, I'm sure there are people sitting on this side of the House who heard exactly the same comments I have over the years. That's because sometimes we don't allow the system here to illuminate itself to the general public. Both of us can score equally with the open ground rules. Let's keep it that way. That's my first point.

Secondly, the amounts of the budgets: we are spending -- or investing, allocating, transferring, whichever the term is -- just about \$21 billion throughout this province. This week, Saskatchewan just came in with a \$2.1 billion budget, prior to their election. We have 10 times as many dollars to deal with, 10 times as many whatever. I think that needs a more open-ended schedule. For us to close our ears is unfair, I think. The public will get to know the government programs better if the government backbenchers -- and I say this with all sincerity -- take part in the debate, find some of the key issues in some of these budgets, and debate them with the ministers. We could use the time well.

Over my years, and on this side of the House as a backbencher, I think of times and opportunities I missed to press the ministers on special points that needed illuminating and illustrating to the general public. It may not have been that you were trying to embarrass the minister, but you could have raised questions about, let's say, the heritage fund. We as a government spent some \$900,000 trying to communicate the heritage fund to the people of Alberta. If, on this side of the House, the backbenchers would look at special kinds of items in the heritage fund and illuminate them, we have a medium here from which we could get it out to the public. But that wasn't the case taken, not used to the advantage that it has here. I think that should be examined by government as well, certainly, as the opposition. That takes time, not just 12 days, because in 12 days you spend an hour or two a day. That goes very quickly if everybody is doing his job.

I know closure had to come down last year to end the debate. Both of us recognized, maybe on both sides of the House, that that may have been the only medium to close the debate. But that's a unique experience, good for all of us, as I've said before. I don't think the harsh measure of long-term standing rules is the solution to that problem. If the government has done something or left themselves somewhat open on a certain topic, the debate must be prolonged. In that situation we did. In this House, I think it should be the same way.

We only have a small opposition. The first opposition in my 19 years was the six Conservative members on that side of the House. Prior to that time, we had three members: two Liberals, one Independent. I can't recall prior to that, but they were a very quiet opposition. We had no question period at that time. We had very few resolutions on the Order Paper. We had very few night sittings, because we could carry on most of the business in the afternoon. There were very few rules.

Then the six opposition members came in, and we left as much latitude as we could. At that time, we introduced the three-quarters of an hour question period. We allowed for special rules for the opposition. I think they didn't have to second certain resolutions. Certain speaking arrangements were made. The Conservative opposition under Mr. Lougheed had total open rules to study the budget and anything else. We existed under that period of time. As a government, we lost in 1971. If that was the reason for it, maybe the government has a reason for bringing these in now. But hopefully, just the change in the rules isn't going to save the government from destruction. But it existed very well then.

We have six people over there, not united. Look at the desks there: three, one, one, and one. We all independently plan how we're going to approach the budget. In terms of that, I think use of time certainly isn't going to be any more than it has been under normal circumstances in other years. So I see no reason why we should be scrambling to tighten up the rules like you are at the present time.

A little earlier, someone said: expedite but not suppress. Sure we want to expedite. But I think common sense has prevailed over the years. Nobody is out to take advantage of the situation. If the reason the rules are to be changed is that the opposition may be increasing in the next Legislature or the Legislature after that, maybe there is a reason. But at the present time, with six people and this sitting of the Legislature -- this is the third Legislature -- I think we should leave it up to the next Legislature to look at rule changes. It worked for the first two years.

I think the government is overreacting to what happened last fall, by trying to suppress us and cut us off. I think that's not too impressive. If that's the route the government wants to go, we'll have to scream it to the rooftops and tell Albertans that's what is happening to us. I think we're making more out of this thing. The government is creating a problem that just doesn't have to be there. We feel that way in our caucus, and I know the other members on the opposite side of the House feel the very same way. It's difficult for us to understand why the government is pushing it ahead. I think the government should reconsider it in their caucus.

Mr. Chairman, we're at a stage right now where I am locked into a position. I know the government caucus is locked into a position. We aren't going to solve it tonight. It's just impossible.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ready for the question? Mrs. Osterman, did you wish to get in here?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition has made some very excellent points. Obviously we have a difference of opinion in terms of where the proper balance lies in how much time we spend in the Legislature and how much time we spend in our constituency. I would only say that a goodly number of us feel that, indeed, now is the time to discuss rule changes, if we feel that we would be more effective with some time management whereby all of us know with some degree of certainty when we come here the number of days that are going to be spent on certain things. Of course, when it comes to legislation, that opens it up to a whole other area and possible time we'll spend there.

But in terms of the balance and the timing of discussing this, if we leave it to the heat of the moment, when we end up with a major problem in the Assembly where one group feels that they've hit on a so-called soft spot in government and want to carry a discussion on and on and on, going over and over the same points, obviously I don't think that's a very good time to do it. So when, do you say, is a good time? After you've had an experience like that and everybody has cooled down, it provides you with a very excellent opportunity to observe and then try to make some rational decision as to how you should indeed manage your time, if you believe it should be managed. I for one would say that my constituents believe my time should be managed. The month that I believe was lost last winter was one we may pay dearly for. We see a number of governments spending many, many months -- maybe a good part of the year -- in the Legislature or in Parliament. The people working for that government are putting into effect programs we vote for here, by way of legislation, a budget, or whatever. We really don't have a way of assessing just how effective they are.

So I would say that, indeed, I believe there should be a balance. I think the opposition has some ability to, number one, pick those so-called soft areas, if they believe they're there and concentrate on them. Within the time management we're talking about, the time allowed, I think they'll have that opportunity, and they'll have to choose wisely.

I believe that the people of the province have a right to expect the politicians who are making policy, promoting so-called programs for the good of the people, ought to be out there finding out how those programs are working. I for one haven't had that kind of time. I think we have to have a balance. I think the balance we have tried to strike by the rule changes is a good one, and I for one certainly would not advocate accepting the hon. member's motion.

MRS. FYFE: Mr. Chairman, there are many variations in the democratic parliamentary system. One, the Mother of Parliament in Britain limits questions that are asked of the government members. In fact, they must be written down ahead of time. So question period becomes quite restrictive. The Prime Minister of that country spends a very limited number of minutes each week available to the Members of Parliament to answer questions. I believe it's one or two 15-minute periods a week.

We have far greater latitude within this very small Assembly, compared to the number of members there, in the opportunity to ask questions and participate. The numbers have to be very important. If we sat in a parliament that had over 400 members, perhaps you could look at these rules and say: this simply does not allow adequate time for that number of people to have equal share in the participation of debate. In an Assembly of 79 members, and looking at the number of months the Legislature has sat in the past, these rules are not restrictive. This is not a precedent cutting down the number of available days. In fact, they're quite generous compared to the total number of days we have sat over the past years. So there's no intention to frustrate the debating process that takes place within this Legislature.

Local government is often criticized by many for too much talk and not enough decision. What often happens is that the members get caught up in debating and rehashing old issues, instead of taking time to evaluate policy directions and, more importantly, to make decisions. Democracy is not known as the most efficient instrument of government, but it's the best system we have devised to try to represent the views of the people who elect us and to come to a final decision, allowing adequate time for the members to participate in that process.

I represent one of the largest constituencies in Alberta. The comments I received last fall when we were in the Legislature were not an understanding of the issues that went on within the Legislature as much as the concern that I was not in the constituency listening to comments. That's extremely important from my point of view, representing a very diversified constituency and having sufficient time to spend within that constituency listening to the concerns of business, the agricultural community, and all the varied groups and individuals who reside there. I cannot see that this will take anything away from the legislative process we have. But I think it will expedite to ensure there is a fairness to all members and also to allow the balance that other members have spoken about this evening.

With those comments, I simply say that I also could not support the motion before us this evening. I believe it is only fair that we proceed with the motion on the Order Paper.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, I don't want to prolong debate on this particular motion. However, I want to make two points, primarily in response to the Leader of the Opposition. The first is that my personal involvement in

this committee -- I can't speak for other members -- is not based on political brownie points of one side or the other, regardless of what happened last time. I would say clearly, though, that my constituents obviously did not have the same view of productivity in that month that the hon. Leader of the Opposition's did, according to his report. My concern is that this Legislature work as effectively as possible. If the Leader of the Opposition or other members of this committee feel that specific parts of those rules introduced will not allow it to do that, will not allow it to be fair and work in the way it should, we should discuss those specific points. I am willing to take a look at them.

In terms of where we're going, the leader himself outlined the progress made in the evolution of rules which, when there is very little to discuss, require very few rules and, when there is much to discuss, require more to ensure that happens clearly; and, in that description, outlined in his own words why there is a need for a further and ongoing evaluation of the rules.

So I would vote against the motion and hope that all members here look, as a purpose, at how the House operates and how it might operate most effectively, rather than who is going to make political brownie points on what side.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favor of Mr. Speaker's motion? Those opposed? The motion fails.

I would like to reopen discussion by committee members with respect to the motion that has been referred to the committee, Motion No. 1.

MR. COOK: Mr. Chairman, just a procedural suggestion. For example, we might do what we do in Public Accounts: identify items that are of great interest, tag those, and raise them as something of a priority. I am quite satisfied with the whole package. But if some members of the committee wanted to flag a point for debate, that might be a useful way to target our limited time resources.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly I felt that point had been made earlier in discussion. If that point is not clear, members should feel quite unrestrained as to which, if any, provisions of this motion they would like to comment on tonight.

MR. MACK: Mr. Chairman, I am troubled some with the posturing of the Leader of the Opposition, taking a position where no rule changes are required, nor could he at this point in time -- hopefully tomorrow they may review their position and perhaps give us some supportive debate on the rule changes so there can be some unanimity, if possible, or certainly an understanding. For example, I would like to raise item D. It is only one of many, but if that gives the Leader of the Opposition some difficulty, I certainly don't see why we could not review that one and perhaps replace it with the current time allotted or some other time -- two hours, or whatever it might be. But to just take a position that no, we will not consider any changes -- with due respect, I would question that position as to whether it is a fair one.

I think it's not necessarily numbers that make good arguments. Therefore, to suggest that because the numbers are small creates a real problem, I don't buy that. I reflect back on the six who used to be there. I was a staunch Sacred supporter at one time, believe it or not. I was won over by the arguments put forward by the small six opposition members, simply the quality of the debate and alternatives presented. I raise that not in the tone of criticism but in the area of logistics. Logically, I think we have to address those inequities in our rules. It's a positive move forward, and it will enhance and not derogate the parliamentary process. That's all I have to say.

MR. MOORE: Mr. Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition has put forward a proposal, if you like, that the package be either rejected or accepted. We voted, discussed, and debated briefly the matter of rejecting the matter before us. It seems to me it would be in order, in order to move the committee's debating along, to move that the matter before us be referred to the Legislative Assembly with the recommendation it be accepted as outlined. I have thought for some time about the rules that are before us and have concluded -- with the possible exception of debating some of the time limits that exist, both in the number of days and on the speaking time, as the hon. member Mr. Mack has pointed out -- that they are inherently fair. One could debate whether the right number is 25, 20, or 28 days, or whether the right number of minutes to speak is 90 or some other time. From my point of view, we have given a fair bit of consideration -- at least the government caucus did -- before this matter was introduced into the Assembly. We concluded that it was fair in the context of what other legislatures in Canada and the House of Commons have with respect to time limits on debate insofar as estimates are concerned.

The business of government, in terms of its financial plan, must go on. In this Legislature, we are accountable not just for four or five weeks a year, as was the case Mr. Speaker referred to some years ago when he first joined the Assembly, but on two occasions a year. On each occasion are debates of a general nature in which any member, including opposition members, can debate the government's financial plan -- during the fall in various areas and during the spring in the general budget debate and throne speech debate. Indeed in various Bills presented to the House, we often get into debates on the financial plan the government has outlined. It is not as though we restrict the time just to what's outlined in this Bill. There are other ways and avenues by which a member can influence the estimates or expenditures presented by the government.

Therefore, I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing recommend to the Assembly changes in rules as outlined in the motion presented to the House and referred to this committee by the hon. Mr. Crawford.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion of the motion?

MR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Chairman, can I have the actual motion as made read again?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Moore, can we trouble you to read your motion again?

MR. MOORE: I'd like to move that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing recommend to the Legislative Assembly that the motion as outlined, presented by the hon. Mr. Crawford to the Legislative Assembly and referred to this committee, be accepted as it's been printed before us. Mr. Chairman, I don't know; it would really have to be the record of these three pages that would consist of my motion, if that's in order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I wasn't sure whether I was meant to hear that as Chairman or not.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, what I was saying is that if that's the motion, I understand that the motion does include the three written pages in its referral as printed.

MR. MOORE: That's right.

MR. KING: Just to be clear about the very last part of the motion, Mr. Chairman. I heard "be accepted". I wonder if it was meant "be recommended to the Assembly". I don't think the direction of this committee is to accept or not accept the resolution proposed by the hon. Government House Leader. I think we're charged with making some kind of recommendation to the Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. King. Mr. Moore, on your first attempt at wording you did in fact use the verb referred a return to the Legislative Assembly with the recommendation that it be accepted as drafted. If you would be prepared to accept that very minor adjustment to the wording.

MR. MOORE: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. King, for that clarification. Any further discussion of the motion?

MR. PAHL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Although I was prepared to do the very same thing as my colleague Mr. Moore has, in speaking to the motion I would like to observe for all members that it was the opposition who requested that a committee of the Legislature consider these rules. I assume that a good representation of members of the opposition had some opportunity to be on this committee. I note that only the hon. Leader of the Opposition is here.

MR. R. SPEAKER: There are only two of us.

MR. PAHL: There is another member of the opposition on this committee. Certainly, from the remarks of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, to be fair to the member he's not really indicated a willingness to deal with it in the committee. I don't recall who in the opposition made the request that it be here. But I guess I would be hesitant to accept the motion, because that other member of the opposition is not here to express his views and make an input to the debate at committee stage.

Just to sum up: in view of the fact that the opposition did ask to have it go to committee and they're 50 per cent here, or 50 per cent absent, would lead me to be reluctant to move out of committee until both members of the opposition had an opportunity to fully express their views in committee.

MR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Chairman, I want to make a few remarks -- some of them will be very general -- about what is before us. First, though, I share the concern some members have already expressed, that the issues involved will not be fully gone into by the committee for the reason that, on the one hand, the resolution is here in this form because the government caucus reached a consensus after discussion and proposed it in that form. That's the one side. In other words, everything there is acceptable to those members of the committee. The other member of the committee present tonight, the Member for Little Bow, has indicated that basically none of it is acceptable. So we have a stand-off that makes the situation in the committee look rather like it has occasionally looked in the Assembly when we were discussing the whole cornerstone question of whether there should be a limited number of days of debate in matters of supply.

We have really gotten this far without having changed anything. The whole atmosphere of the committee was not to canvass past positions, but to determine the merit of what is proposed. I don't see how that can be done without discussing the items. Speaking for myself as a member of the committee, it was the merit of the matters proposed that I hoped to see discussed. I heard the Leader of the Opposition make his point that whatever may have gone before did not call for a permanent amendment to *Standing*

Orders. I suggest that argument was based on a feeling that if the rules were left the way they are -- and I think this was aimed primarily at the number of days limitation proposal -- it was unlikely that the events of last fall would repeat themselves very soon, that it would be on some other occasion, distant perhaps, that this would ever occur again; therefore, we shouldn't be dealing with this matter now.

I don't suppose I've grasped the full import and strength of that argument. But when the matter was before the Assembly last fall, the argument that really all the government had to do if it wanted to get the public business done was what it did -- that is, bring in a special resolution -- to me is not as good a solution as having standing orders which clearly declare what should be done in regard to the business of the House, in order that all members will have greater certainty about how the business of the House will be conducted. All the other standing orders are there for the purpose of bringing certainty to our business. That's why they're there. We can quote any number of rules, right down to the fact that the motion to adjourn isn't debatable; little ones like that. Why? Because parliament decided on some occasion that it would organize its business that way, that would be predictable, and members would know that that would be a rule. It was not put in to make discussions impossible or difficult in any way. It was there because in the minds of those who made the standing order at the time it was an essential element of the orderly conduct of business. I say that all of our standing orders are there for that reason, that they be essential to the orderly conduct of our business.

I don't want to reiterate arguments made when the House in the Assembly considered Motion No. 1, which we now have by way of referral. But I do want to point out that there were a number of things there which surely just smooth the flow of work through the Assembly. For example, the idea that the government Whip should be able to have until a certain hour on Friday instead of a certain hour on Thursday to designate business for the following Tuesday, is a pretty reasonable proposition. It does not defy or challenge any great rule of parliament. You have the part that goes with that only because we found some difficulty with temporary Standing Order No. 8 being too restrictive in the past; that the notice filed the previous Thursday would have to declare what business was done the following Tuesday. We found that it could happen that if you declared a certain item of business for the following Tuesday and draft that on a Thursday morning, because of the way business progresses, by the time you get to Tuesday that business is already done. So you have a proposal to deal with business that is meaningless, because it's already been handled. It's such a simple thing to say we'll allow the extra day and let it be Friday instead of Thursday. It gives a much better opportunity of judging it and lets it be more flexible, the same way it is on every day of government business when any business might be called. So make Tuesday the same as the others, and let any business be called. That's not a very rash proposal.

I skip around perhaps to some of the others. Item F, the renumbering section, is not a very large matter to ask members to contemplate. Item G: it has long been the case that, under Standing Order 51, when a member attended a committee he was not a member of, he didn't vote. That's always been the case, but the standing order didn't say that. The proposal was: let us make that well-established tradition part of the *Standing Orders*, where it surely does belong. But it doesn't change anything by itself.

The reference to having normal adjournment hours isn't any different in principle than what the Assembly operates under five days a week. There are normal adjournment hours, of 5:30 p.m. or 1 p.m. Other than creating a normal adjournment hour, at midnight, for occasions when the Assembly is sitting in

the evening, that proposal simply reiterates what's long been the standing order.

I don't make these remarks in any sense trying to say that a number of the other matters are not controversial. But when I originally said that what we should be doing is examining the merit of it, I would like to have heard a proposal, for example -- and I think the Member for Edmonton Belmont made a similar remark -- that says to us: your limit of 90 minutes is wrong, and it should be some other figure; or it's wrong, and you should let it be unlimited as it always was: something along that line as a positive proposal, that being the process the committee is here to follow, as I see it, the process of beginning to examine the merits of what is proposed. I think all members of the committee would be willing to hear that the proposal to change 2 a.m. to midnight -- once again, it doesn't change anything in principle. Standing Order 20 refers to 2 a.m.; we say Standing Order 20 should refer to midnight. There's no great parliamentary principle at stake. There is already a limiting hour there. Should it be some other time? Should it stay at 2 a.m.? Is that desirable? Maybe it is. Should it be 1 a.m.? That's another possibility.

It's this type of discussion I thought we would have, so that the result of the committee may well be that a variation of the Resolution No. 1, as referred to the committee, might go back to the Assembly and that rather than opposition members saying they merely oppose and challenge the entire concept and the entire resolution, they would be in a position to say: we support this resolution insofar as certain changes have been made, although there are other parts we don't support; but having got to the committee, we're happy for the opportunity of having changed some of it. That would be a normal committee process. That could well result, if the committee does its work with that objective in mind. So I hope there is more discussion with respect to what might be done in assessing the merits and in making changes of some type.

Another one was -- and these are not in any way proposals of mine at this point -- the suggestion that the Leader of the Opposition would have the right to choose the department to be considered every Monday. There is a suggestion that once it's been chosen for one Monday, it should not be chosen for another one of the available Mondays. I don't think that's a very necessary stricture. If the Leader of the Opposition made the argument that it could well be so important that a particular department be examined exhaustively, I think that rule might drop. This committee might recommend to the Assembly that it was an unnecessary proposal.

Mr. Chairman, as I close my remarks I want to move, without notice to my hon. colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs, an amendment to his motion of concurrence. It is very much a drafting matter only. At the bottom of the second page, where Standing Order 51 is referred to, there is a definition of appropriation Bill which says: "(a) . . . (b)". There should in fact be item (c), "a Bill to provide for interim supply". That should also be under the definition of "appropriation Bill". It was simply inadvertently omitted. It should be perfectly clear that an appropriation Bill should include a Bill to provide for interim supply. It is not caught by 51.4(1)(a), because a Bill for interim supply doesn't go to the Committee of Supply. That is why it has to be separately set out, and that's why I move the amendment (c) to that clause in order to include the interim supply Bills, which, as I've said, I'm sure every member would agree are properly described as appropriation Bills.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion with respect to Mr. Moore's motion as amended by Mr. Crawford?

MR. R. SPEAKER: I think it should be clear that the rule brought in, and listening to all the arguments here, is for one purpose: to suppress the

opposition, to limit our time schedule. The rule changes are for the opposition only. I think that's unfair. Secondly, we didn't ask for any rule changes. The more rules put into the House, the less flexibility. We're satisfied the way they are.

I'd like to say this to the government: when they're in opposition, they'd better remember, if we pass it tonight, that they put the rule in. When they're restricted in time to study the budget, don't cry about it, because they've done something to themselves. Most likely, historically those words will be remembered.

The next point is that, historically, budget debates have been reasonable. I don't think we on that side of the House have been unreasonable in prolonging debate on the budget, the heritage fund. It was questionable last fall, but that was something a little different from the actual heritage fund budget. There was a special item. The items that have been raised by the hon. Attorney General is that those are side issues to the real issue. The real issue is restriction of time to study two major budgets. We see no necessity for it.

The point has been raised that as an opposition we should consider the rule changes. We didn't bring them in or ask for them. Why should I bring in a compromise tonight to something I didn't submit in the first place? Maybe it's up to the government to look at some kind of compromise and suggest, look, we want to make some changes for you in the opposition -- not with you, but for you -- because we want to kind of restrict what you're doing, because that's exactly what it is. Then it's up to the government. The government opened the negotiations and put something on the table. We didn't.

The best I can do, Mr. Chairman, is go back to the six in opposition and raise this position of the government, that that's what they want to do to us. If one of the members looks at it and decides to change, I can come back and report that position. But as it is tonight, I can only say that I have to vote against the motion before us. If the government wants to impose that on us, we'll live with it some way or other and do our job the best we can. But future legislators have to live with the same restrictions. Some of the people on this side of the House had better not forget they may be in opposition one of these days. So that's where we are.

Mr. Chairman, the best commitment I can make tonight is to take it back. I will relate the debate that's gone on here this evening and ask if they have any changes, want to make any submissions, and report that back at the next meeting. If you wish to put the motion on hold, I can make that commitment. Beyond that, I can't talk at all about the nitty-gritty or making amendments. I haven't any authority to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As you are well aware aware, Mr. Speaker, as chairman I can't put a motion on hold without direction from the committee.

Before calling on Mr. Cook and then Mr. Gogo, could I ask Mr. Pahl to resume the Chair for me.

(Mr. Pahl in the Chair)

MR. COOK: Mr. Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition raised a couple of points that maybe bear being touched on. One, he talked about having a reasonable length of time to discuss budget items. It's interesting to note that historically the Legislature has not gone over the length of time that is proposed by the Government House Leader. In fact, not even during the last discussions in the fall did the Assembly push the limits of the time allocation that is being proposed. So I don't think there's really any reason to suggest that the government is suggesting something that is onerous or unreasonable.

It's also worth noting that the resolution before us restricts the time for the Premier. So it's not just a resolution that affects the opposition. It's also worth noting that the opposition, for the first time, is being allowed to call estimates for departments. That affords them an opportunity to target pressure on departments and make a point.

It's also worth noting the the opposition has other options or tools to make points. If they use the Order Paper effectively -- for example, there is one motion by the opposition on the present Order Paper. Each one is allowed two. That means there would be a potential of 12 motions. All could deal with an item. If the opposition were really incensed about an item that the government is proceeding with, there is ample opportunity in a variety of ways: motions, Bills, orders for return, questions, as well as grilling during the estimates.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, it's worth noting that the opposition was offered three positions on this committee. Two were finally appointed. I guess the opposition didn't see this item as being sufficiently important to put much time into it. So two members were appointed, and one showed up tonight. Again, I guess this matter is of sufficient importance that the opposition has decided that they are basically in accord with it, because they haven't researched the material. They don't have a position on individual items. Only one member is here. Maybe we should proceed with this, if the opposition isn't taking the committee process seriously, the process that they initiated and demanded. If they're not serious about the process, Mr. Chairman, maybe we should just proceed.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, I'm a member of the caucus that discussed this, not in great detail, but in principle. I felt it was a good idea after it had been agreed to go to committee, to deal with this in such a manner that we could have it back in the form of a recommendation to the House on April 2.

I have been looking at other jurisdictions. I look at Montana, which has 60 days a year; Wyoming, 45 days a year; Louisiana, which doesn't operate under the British parliamentary system. Tonight I came quite prepared, believing that A through I was a good way to go. However -- and I'm speaking now to the suggestion of the Member for Edmonton Mill Woods, who happens to be in the Chair at the moment -- I was looking forward to suggestions or arguments from members of the opposition, who requested that this go to committee. I'm not hearing them. I'm hearing from the Leader of the Opposition that really if you have to go, go, but I'm against going. And we're missing a member; I believe it's the Member for Clover Bar.

So I'm reluctant to proceed and vote for the motion by the Minister of Municipal Affairs without hearing the Member for Clover Bar. I don't know why he's not here. In my view, we have sufficient time between now and April 2 for a written report. I'd like to hear from that member before I support the motion by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to make the point that I strongly disagree with the contention that these rules are indeed, quote, just to suppress the opposition, unquote. I feel very strongly that they're rules which I'd be quite willing to live with in oppositin and which are fair and just. But as I said earlier, I'm willing to look at options. Other members have expressed that desire as well.

I think the Leader of the Opposition indicated that he would take back the question of what in fact specifically concerns the opposition and report back to us. My personal suggestion would be that we adjourn, not having resolved this motion tonight -- I don't know that we can accomplish a great deal more -- and then proceed tomorrow after the Leader of the Opposition has brought back, hopefully, some reasonable suggestions that might improve this package.