

8:18 a.m.

Monday, December 3, 2007

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order. We'll first of all go through introductions, as usual. Rob Lougheed, MLA Strathcona and chair of the committee.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Herard: Denis Herard, Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Mitzel: Len Mitzel, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Pastoor: Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Senior Parliamentary Counsel.

Dr. McNeil: David McNeil, Clerk to the Assembly.

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

Ms Gravel: Micheline Gravel, Clerk of *Journals*/Table Research.

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

Ms Blakeman: Welcome to the winter wonderland that is my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'm Laurie Blakeman.

Mr. Hancock: Dave Hancock, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Johnson: LeRoy Johnson, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe you had distributed the agenda, which is pretty simple: point 2, Approval of Agenda; point 3, Adoption of Minutes; point 4, Identification of Issues Concerning Supply Process; point 5, the Final Report Process; point 6, Other Business; point 7, Date of Next Meeting; and then Adjournment. Can I have approval of the agenda as presented? Len moves. All those in favour of adopting this agenda? Opposed? That's carried.

Minutes from the November 26 meeting. The minutes were distributed, and the *Hansard* copy was also posted to be read by all who wanted to. Any questions about the minutes? Any errors or omissions? Can I have somebody move? Heather moves adoption of the minutes as presented. All those in favour? Opposed? That's carried.

Last meeting we spent a little bit of time talking about all sorts of other issues besides Standing Order 59, which we have to have a report on by Thursday. We have to report to the Assembly by Thursday about Standing Order 59, so today we'll be able, I'm sure, to limit our discussion only to Standing Order 59.

One thing I would ask. Wednesday is our next scheduled meeting, Wednesday at lunchtime. We will hopefully have a little report to table, and at that time we'll come together and approve that report to be tabled. Between now and then if you would think about what

we are going to do with respect to all the other standing orders that we're supposed to review and report on in February, keeping in mind all the challenges of the upcoming Christmas holiday and January, when I'm sure several people will be away, and February, when session will start, or who knows what all might be going on by then, how long we'll be sitting, all those questions that are in everybody's minds. Think about what you want to do. There may be some comments, perhaps, on Wednesday whether that's a good idea, that we take some time and try and get something in place before session starts in February so it's outlined and ready to go. Anyway, that's something we have to consider.

Let's move along, then, with 59, and try to get prepared to write a report here at the end of this little meeting today. Do we have anybody that has comments to offer? I know, Dave, you were scheduled to speak last day, or you had the opportunity and weren't able to make it. Perhaps today you would like to make a presentation unless somebody wants to make comments before Dave speaks. Does anybody have any thoughts beforehand? Denis, you look like you're thinking.

Mr. Herard: No. My pacemaker is going off here.

The Chair: Is that a good sign?

Mr. Herard: I'm still here.

The Chair: All right. Dave, would you like to make some comments that you didn't have opportunity to last day?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Chair. Yeah. I apologize that I was scheduled for another meeting last week at the same time, so I couldn't make it.

I believe that we had a very good process for the handling of Committee of Supply. I'm biased, of course, because with the other House leaders we created that process. The problem with our Committee of Supply processes over the years is that we've never kept any one of them long enough to really do a proper evaluation of how effective they are. I think this one did work.

There are a couple of issues that I think need to be dealt with. First of all, as you will be aware, the provision in the standing order is for 75 hours in committee. We spent I think about 60 hours in committee last year. That seemed to be a significant amount of time. I'm not going to recommend personally that we change it to 60 hours from 75 hours, but I would indicate that 75 hours is a time frame which is contemplating a regular sitting period. In other words, the House comes in on the first Monday in February, the budget comes down the second Thursday in February, and then you have 75 hours to look at Committee of Supply.

We didn't make provision in the Standing Orders for how you deal with it if you don't have that kind of a sitting. If the budget comes in later than the 14th of February, which is contemplated in the rules, then what do you do? That's not built in there. So I think the committee does need to address the issue of what happens if a session starts late or if a budget comes down late. I think we should address that, to provide for 75 hours unless the ordinary sitting times are not adhered to and then put in a fail-safe which allows the House leaders or the Legislature to set the time. That's one piece.

8:25

The other piece – and I haven't had a chance to talk with the other House leaders about this – is that we had a 15-hour rotation schedule which allowed for a Liberal opposition day, a New Democratic opposition day, and then a government private mem-

bers' day, and then a cross-ministry. We did not schedule in time which allowed the independents time on it, which was a bit of a concern. It was also a scheduling nightmare, if you will, to bring ministries back three or four or five times. I don't remember how many times anyone came, so it might not have been five.

In my view, we should look at whether or not we could do a rotation which would be set. Have the opposition parties in conjunction with the House leader, but with the preference of the opposition parties, determine the rotation – in other words, which ministries were called in what order – but perhaps complete a ministry before moving on to the next. If people are concerned that you won't get to the last ministry, perhaps you could set a limited amount of time for each ministry, and then if there's time remaining at the end, they could be called back if there were more.

The one area that there was a significant, I think, change to the system was the concept of trying to do cross-ministry sittings, and I apologize that I wasn't here to hear what Edmonton-Centre said last week. I'm not sure how successful that was considered to be because it was essentially questioning. We didn't seem to get into discussions, in my experience, on the cross-ministry. It was really just an attempt to ask questions back and forth. My preference would be a rotation that called ministries in order, have the order set by the opposition, deal with them until they're done, and then if necessary once you're finished the rotation, you have the opportunity to call a ministry back. But generally speaking, I think it worked very well.

We could live with it continuing as it is now with the one caveat, that if the budget came in any later than the 14th, that the 75-hour time frame, in my view, is predicated on the normal sitting times of the session as set out in the temporary Standing Orders: coming in on the first Monday, budget on the second Thursday.

The Chair: Anybody have questions of Dave with his comments here?

Laurie, do you have a question?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm disappointed to hear that the minister doesn't read *Hansard* every day to catch comments. I had agreed that the cross-ministry idea was a very good one, but we hadn't got it to work. I don't want to abandon it yet because I think we can get it to work, and I think it's an important concept in this day and age where issues are multilayered, so I think we need to leave that one in place and try a bit harder.

My other suggestion, to get around the problem of each caucus coming in and essentially repeating many of the same key questions of the minister, was to somehow offer a brief recap that would be available. Since I seem to be the only one that does read *Hansard*, perhaps a recap could be offered to people that would give them an idea of what had gone before them.

Also, some of the extra time that we were looking at in the 75-hour rotation was offered to any member, including the private members and the independent member and the fourth party, but also extra people had been able to pick up the time beyond the three hours that was available in a given day. So if we got started right at 2:30, we were finished at 5:30 with the three-hour designation, and there was a half hour in there for people to ask questions. The times I checked, that time was used. Private members did make use of that time and ask questions, but it was the luck of the draw when we started the day as to whether the time was available there.

But I agree. I think we need to contemplate an election year, frankly, where we would not be able to get in the 75 hours, perhaps. On top of that you're also going to end up in interim supply, and you're probably going to end up with a sup supply, and that adds time on to what we're doing. So, yeah, we should contemplate that.

The Chair: Other comments?

If I might suggest, then, that we look at a few of these issues that perhaps there's consensus about. Then there are a couple of areas where there isn't consensus, try and nail that down and decide what we recommend. There wasn't mention here, I don't believe, but it was written somewhere. Somebody sent a note to me with respect to the 26th Legislature, that if it ends, then we should have in the Standing Orders that 59 would operate until the end of December 2008. Is that not correct?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. We did talk about that.

The Chair: So we don't want to leave it just for the 26th Legislature; we want to instead make a recommendation that this would go through to the end of 2008. Is that correct? Comments on that particular aspect?

Mr. Hancock: That should apply to all those temporary standing orders because, otherwise, a new session will come without the temporary standing orders in place.

The Chair: Well, we're supposed to report on 59, but I guess we could also make a recommendation about the rest of them. Is that something that you would propose, Dave?

Mr. Hancock: Certainly. I'd move that we recommend that the temporary standing orders be extended until the end of December 2008.

The Chair: Except for changes that we might recommend in the report.

Mr. Hancock: Right.

The Chair: Comments from staff?

Dr. McNeil: I think, Chair, that you should ask for that motion from a member of the committee.

The Chair: Which he is.

Mr. Hancock: I don't know how that happened.

Dr. McNeil: Okay. Sorry. My mistake.

Mr. Hancock: I wasn't paying attention that day, obviously.

The Chair: Anything else? Any other thoughts, Rob? Dave? Shannon? Anybody? Louise?

Mrs. Kamuchik: No.

The Chair: Okay. Dave moved that the temporary standing orders be extended to the end of 2008. Any more comments on that? Dave, that was with the understanding: except for recommended changes. Right?

Mr. Hancock: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. All those in favour of extending? Opposed? One opposed. Thank you. It's carried.

Second item, if I might maybe pick off a few of these that I think there is consensus about: 60 hours versus 75 hours and the start date

for the budget. I believe it was sort of said that if the budget is delayed past February 14, the expected start date, then we would revert to 60 hours, as recommended for this current year as well in the temporary standing orders. So they would have 60 hours if in 2008 the budget comes in after February 14. Is that my understanding of what has been talked about here from folks?

Laurie, you have a comment?

Ms Blakeman: I'm going to quibble about using that particular wording. I understand the concept as outlined by the Government House Leader, but I would argue that it needs to be wording that's a bit more connected with whether or not we have a session starting because I don't want to see a situation where the government decides to bring in the budget on February 15 and then get 60 hours instead of 75. This is meant to be structured around whether there was an election or, you know, a pandemic or some other very large reason why we wouldn't be commencing the budget process very close to the date that we contemplated.

8:35

The Chair: You're talking in terms, then – are you? – of having it contingent upon the start date of the session as opposed to budget day?

Ms Blakeman: No. I'm saying that we need to be very careful about the wording of it.

The Chair: Any other comments?

Mr. Hancock: I'm wondering, just asking the Clerk, in terms of drafting this. The concept, really, is one of having a fail-safe provision and moving to the 60 hours in the event that the session is interrupted by an election or a pandemic. I mean, it can't just be election specific. But I guess this is only for one year, anyway, and we'll be tinkering with it again before the end of next year. I'm wondering if we can't just say 60 hours next year.

Ms Blakeman: No.

The Chair: Any other comments?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chair, I would move that Standing Order 59.02(2) be amended so that "during the 2007 Spring Sitting" reads "2008 Spring Sitting" and that at the end of it, subject to drafting, we add words to the effect of "in the event that the normal time for tabling the budget is extended past February 15."

The Chair: Sounds a little convoluted to me. Rob, can you . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. As part of the team that would help draft this particular order, I'm just wondering. The temporary standing order now says that the budget shall be on February 14. Saying we'll come in on the first Monday in February, the budget will be on February 14.

Mr. Hancock: Unless it's otherwise set.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. Unless it's changed.

Mr. Hancock: Of course, there are other things that could interfere with that.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. Would the point be that if session started later

– if session started, let's say, to pick a date, after March 31, would that be the fail-safe option?

Mr. Hancock: I would say after March 1 because then you essentially don't have time to do anything between March and June other than budget. So March 1 is really the fail-safe date.

Dr. McNeil: I guess my question would be: is March 1 the fail-safe date as far as when session starts or when the budget is delivered?

Ms Blakeman: Budget delivered.

Mr. Hancock: Budget delivered, yeah.

Ms Blakeman: And that we can commence the process. There's a likelihood, given history, that we could have a budget and then an election. What we're really concerned about is leaving ourselves enough time to debate a budget. I think that, yeah, the March 1 date is okay.

Mr. Hancock: Well, budget and election takes care of itself because it goes away, and then we start a new session.

Ms Blakeman: It would come again. Yeah. Okay.

Mr. Hancock: You work with a new session.

Ms Blakeman: I'm okay with that.

The Chair: We would be in a new session. If we make the date 2008, and if you have one budget presented earlier and then an election, that'll take care of itself in the wording somehow there.

Ms Dean: I have a question. I'm clear about extending the application of that suborder (2) to 2008. However, that other element with respect to the start time of the budget: is the proposal that that be a standing order that just applies for 2008?

Mr. Hancock: I just was trying to find a temporary fix that would get us through to the end. If we have to review these by the end of 2008, we can perhaps have another year of experience and then fix the whole thing.

The Chair: There's a request for clarification here.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, if I may, I think we're all talking the same thing. It's just trying to figure out how you put it on paper. My understanding from what Laurie and Dave are saying is that right now it's in the works that we go the first Monday in February and the budget is the 14th. After the 14th of February, currently we debate 75 hours. What is on the table at this particular time is if something unforeseen happens, that we don't have that time. What Laurie and Dave are both proposing is – let's say the budget isn't presented until March 1. We want to ensure that we get a minimum of 60 hours after that on the budget. It doesn't have to be 75. It's 60 hours. That should be easy enough, in my mind – we've got a roomful of lawyers here – to get that on paper. If that's the case, then it seems to me that it would be relatively simple to incorporate in the motion what Laurie and Dave are saying.

The Chair: Other comments?

Mr. Hancock: We could amend the motion to ask the clerks to bring

back for Wednesday's meeting a proposed standing order that meets the purposes expressed.

The Chair: Well, I hope that they would be clear because we have had some discussion, and I think that in a few people's minds they clearly understand different things. Let's make sure that this gets drafted the way we would like.

If I understand it correctly, only one understanding of several in this room, the motion would be that the standing orders be extended as they are but you want the budget date to be March 1 instead of February 14.

Mr. Hancock: No, no.

Mrs. Forsyth: No. I was just using that as an example, Mr. Chair, a date that I pulled out.

Mr. Hancock: There's still another issue. Leave aside the extended-as-they-are piece. What we're really trying to suggest is that if the budget comes down later than February 14, presumably because of an interruption by an election, but I suppose there could be other interruptions which would cause it, you need some flexibility so it's not the 75-hour rule but the 60-hour rule. If the normal tabling of the budget as provided for in the standing orders doesn't happen, then we need flexibility on the time so that we can complete it reasonably within the sitting period. The March 1 date I think is a fail-safe date. I mean, you could accomplish it if it came down before March 1, but after March 1 you couldn't accomplish it without – I haven't done the numbers – having evening sittings and extended sittings.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Let's make one rotation.

The Chair: David, do you have any comments?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. Just as you were saying, if the budget comes down after March 1, then we revert to the 60-hour cycle for 2008.

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. A one sentence motion, then. I understand the motion to be that

for 2008 if the budget is presented after March 1, we revert to a 60-hour instead of a 75-hour cycle.

Ms Blakeman: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. Is that the motion as we all understand it? Any more discussion of this motion? All those in favour of this motion as Dave moved? Opposed? One opposed; the rest in favour. It's carried.

Okay. One other issue, as I understand it, is the time for the independents to have opportunity to present and ask questions. How would you like to deal with that?

Ms Blakeman: Well, we sort of did. If we're on a regular schedule and the 75 hours is in, then they are accommodated, without looking at the particulars, for a good portion of that extra 15 hours. If we are under some time pressures and the previous motion moved and approved comes into play, we're looking at exactly the same situation as we had last year where there is time built in every time, every day, past the three-hour mark, but it's not certain nor able to be scheduled.

8:45

The Chair: Any other thoughts?

Mrs. Forsyth: Just so I understand it. Under the 75-hour rule – I think Laurie made it clear when she was presenting – there is a time allotment for the independents to be able to speak through the budget process. If it's the 60 hours, then it's not because the time is utilized by the opposition.

The Chair: I don't believe that's quite correct because they are 15-hour cycles. David, can you illuminate this a little bit? David McNeil, please.

Dr. McNeil: Well, yeah. Within each 15-hour cycle is what Ms Blakeman is saying, at the end of the three hours – let's say the session starts at 3:30. The budget supply process starts at 3:30, or 2:30. Then by 5:30 the three hours for the Liberals or the governments members or the NDs have been used up, which leaves half an hour left in that day. Now if we start later than, you know, if we start at 2:45 or 3 o'clock, then the independent members don't have the opportunity.

If you look at the chart, distributed or on the website, that was developed in terms of the time that was available to the members, the Alliance member had 15 minutes of the total time, the independent member had 42 minutes of the total time of the almost 60 hours of time allocated during the last supply cycle, the 60-hour cycle. So that gives you some sense of the time that they utilized, not necessarily the time available, but the time that they utilized in that process. I mean, they'd have to speak to the difficulties they encountered, if they did encounter difficulties in terms of getting on the speaking list.

The Chair: Okay. Dave Hancock, did you have a comment? And then Laurie.

Mr. Hancock: No, my preference would be to look at changing the rotation, but given the time frames that we have, I'm happy to live with it for one more year and test how it works. I think all sides had some good things to say about it. You know, there were some negatives that came back, but I think it bears testing for another year. So I would suggest we recommend no change until the end of next year but for if there's something we can look at for an accommodation to make sure. I guess I would look to see whether or not – because the critical pieces, as Mr. Clerk indicated, are not how much time independents used, but how much time was available for them. If there was some understanding that in that last half hour of each day they would have the opportunity, I think that could be accommodated. I think, generally speaking, when they were available, they were recognized.

The Chair: Laurie, you had a comment?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, just for anybody that's following along at home. This is covered – what we're talking about, that extra time – under 59.02(7), which notes that we meet for three hours. Any time in excess of the three hours is "available to any Member who wishes to speak and is recognized by the Chair."

I guess, looking at the time chart that's been allocated, we were limited to 10-minute speaking times, so the independent member actually sort of had four at-bats, and the Alliance member had one and a bit. But, yeah, we need to know how much time was actually available: what time did we finish the three hours, leaving what amount of time following that for the independent members? Not perfect.

The Chair: Other comments? Okay. A motion, then? Would somebody like to make a motion to leave it as it is? Dave, do you have a question first?

Mr. Hancock: Just before we do, I'm wondering: would it make it more palatable if we moved that to two hours and 45 minutes in that section? Then there would be a period of time on any given day regardless of start time.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'll make the motion.

The Chair: Heather, would you like to frame the motion, please?

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, great. I would make the motion, then, that on the 60 hours we keep it as is until the end of 2008, as it's currently in, and review it after the 2008. We're talking 60 hours.

The Chair: The rotation for the independents to be able to speak.

Mrs. Forsyth: Right.

Ms Blakeman: So the rotation stays the same.

Mrs. Forsyth: Right. The rotation stays the same is correct.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chair, if I may. You don't actually need a motion because we've already suggested that everything stay the same except the things we change.

The Chair: True.

Mr. Hancock: So a motion to recommend that the balance of it stay the same.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'll withdraw my motion.

The Chair: Okay. Then, it's our understanding we'll leave that part uncommented upon. Okay?

Now, if I understand some of the questions further, the time for each ministry, the time allotted to each ministry and the callback for some of the ministries. Len, you had a comment?

Mr. Mitzel: Yeah, just before we go to that point, I was just curious about one thing Dr. McNeil mentioned about the Alliance and the independent. He said how much time they actually used, but there was nothing there about how much time was available for them. So I'd be curious to know whether they had more time than they actually used or not. That was left up in the open. Did they actually use all the time that they had available or not? And if they didn't, then, maybe we were discussing something that's – I'm glad we're leaving it the way it is because maybe it's something that doesn't seem to be necessary.

The Chair: Should the staff comment on that now, or shall we leave it for a future report?

Dr. McNeil: We could probably do a calculation of the time available each day, after the three-hour time period in the 60-hour cycle in 2007 to give you some idea as to what time was available.

The Chair: And just make that available for the future deliberations.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: I'm just trying to remember, but it seems to me that I recall sometimes in not necessarily that half hour that was left at the end – because it really is open to anyone that is a member of the House. It seems to me there were a couple of government members that actually spoke in that time, so I think that would skew the numbers as well. I don't know. I mean, don't get me wrong. I don't want to tinker with this the way it is now. I think giving it another year to work its way through, but perhaps we could specify that it was for opposition or independent, or just specify that it would be for independent. But that's a discussion for another day.

The Chair: This is for information for the future discussions. The consensus appears to be we'd just like more information for down the road as the end of 2008 nears, and this may change. Okay. We'll leave that, then.

Next let's consider, then, the time for the ministries, a time for each ministry, the mechanism for calling back ministers, and I think just leave it there for now. Is that my understanding? Is that understanding correct: that's something you wish to discuss here?

Mr. Hancock: I actually sort of abandoned that piece. I mean, we've got a rotation. While it's proved a little complex, I think I hear that we want to try it for one more year, and I don't have a problem with that.

The Chair: Other comments? Okay. We'll just leave that discussion, then. Again, it would not be necessary to make any motions to change it or to leave it alone, if that's what we're doing.

Dave, a comment?

Dr. McNeil: Just in relation to that issue. When you look at the statistics, you'll note that in 2007 the percentage of time occupied by the ministers went up compared to the previous two years that we compared it to. That would be reflective of the fact that the ministers may have to speak in each three-hour segment or each party segment, if you will, or caucus segment, compared to the previous situation. So that shows up in the numbers.

8:55

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, just to clarify. I mean, here's the concern that I've raised, and I guess I just don't know if we have enough time to figure out how to resolve it, but the point the Clerk has mentioned is absolutely correct. If you analyze what happened, ministers spent more time on the record rather than private members having the time, and that was as a result of the scheduling, in my view, of each party scheduling and perhaps covering some of the same ground. My preference personally would be to go into a rotation where a ministry was called and dealt with till it was done, and that way you'd give more time to the ministries that had larger budgets or more controversial issues. And with the 60- or 70-hour time rotation you still should get to all the ministries. If you were concerned about that, you'd put a cap time on, say, five hours per ministry, and then bring them back at the end.

What we ended up doing this time, which was a bit of a problem both in terms of scheduling and in terms of the time utilization, was calling a ministry for each of the Liberal opposition day, the ND opposition day, the Conservative private members' day, and then perhaps for a cross-ministry initiative. I'm not sure if some ministries weren't called for two cross-ministries. So you ended up

coming in, and there was a lot of repetition, I think, if you take a look at what was said.

What I was going to suggest is that we just go to a rotation, that the opposition parties work on who gets called first and what the order of calling is, but they do away with the rest. My understanding was that we still had some work to do on that, so I wasn't going to recommend it. But that would solve the issue that David indicated in terms of the reality is that with our new process, which is supposed to give more time for questioning of ministries, we've actually given more time for answering.

Ms Blakeman: I don't know that that actually would address the problem because if we start changing the rotation, then we're into a whole bunch more negotiation. I think this is a question about communication and preparation. That's why I was suggesting that the ministry could do a bit of administration and release a short list of Q and A, and upcoming caucuses that had the same minister in front of them make use of that information. My hope was that it would allow all of us to move to a different level of question and answer rather than just repeat the same thing over and over again.

To me this is a question of communication and of doing a bit more prep work. That was my hope, that we could try it that way next time, and then see if we can solve some of the problems.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, if I may. I brought this up at the last meeting we had, and it's about clarification in regard to the response of this particular committee that hasn't met in 20 years. We originally started this because it was written in some rules in regard to reviewing Standing Order 59. We seem to have gone from Standing Order 59 to discussions, in my mind, that are out of the bounds of what that Standing Order 59 is. I could be wrong.

I appreciate where this committee is going, and I think it's a good resource. But my understanding is that a lot of the decisions that have been made previously were between the House leaders. Then all of a sudden you've got this committee that's coming in 90 way through with little understanding of the bartering that's going back and forth between the minister and Ms Blakeman.

I guess I'd like to find out what exactly the responsibility of this committee is because originally we had a lot of discussion last meeting on: should we go back to 1:30? All of a sudden we're talking about nights and things like that. So I would really like to get clarification of the responsibilities of this particular committee.

The Chair: Let's maybe answer on this point. Dave.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is how we got to where we are now. House leaders have always got together and worked out details relative to the operation of session. In this case because I was specifically tasked with bringing forward some changes to the way we did our business, we came with some rather extensive renovations to the Standing Orders. It was believed to be prudent, the House being the owner of its own rules, that there ought to be some oversight of the House leaders and the work that we did and that, therefore, in some capacity after the new rules have been tested, it should be able to go back to some methodology where members of the House could have an opportunity to review and say: did it work, or do we want to make changes? This is the committee which has the authority to do that because it has the authority over the Standing Orders.

In the agreement and in the temporary standing orders we asked that the orders be referred to this committee. The House did refer them to this committee in two segments: the first segment, to review after the spring session Standing Order 59 and its subs because we needed to ensure that the provisions for the Committee of Supply

were in place early in the new session so that they could be utilized; then the balance of it prior to the beginning of the session.

All of the temporary standing orders have been referred to this committee, but they were referred in the two segments. The one to report back by the end of this fall session was with respect to Committee of Supply, which is why I believe the chairman wants to focus on that in these meetings, given the time frame. Unfortunately, or fortunately for him, the chair of the committee was appointed to cabinet in the meantime, so meetings weren't held in that interim period. It's section 59 which we're required to report back on before the end of the fall session, but it's the whole temporary standing orders which were referred to the committee. So the whole issue is live for the committee.

If I may, just going back to the other issue, then, briefly, Mr. Chair, I would be happy not to tinker with the system as it's set up and to review it after we've used it one more time.

Mrs. Forsyth: What you're saying, Mr. Minister, is that under the rules that were negotiated in the spring to review Standing Order 59, it includes everything. It could talk about private members' days.

Mr. Hancock: No. There were two things that we referred. The committee was asked to report before the end of the fall session on Standing Order 59.

Ms Blakeman: Which is the budget.

Mr. Hancock: Which is the Committee of Supply budget provisions. It also has the rest of the temporary standing orders in front of it but is not obliged to report on them prior to the end of the fall session. So that's open. There could be meetings in January or some other time to deal with the other issues.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. All right. You know, I do get it sometimes. I just needed clarification.

The Chair: Okay. Let's carry on, then, with 59, which is all, of course, Committee of Supply, and see if there are other things in there that we need to deal with.

I didn't hear any specific discussion about the cross-ministry component. Again, let's have a discussion there, because some people have brought that up as a concern, and decide what we do or don't want to do with that.

Laurie, first comment.

Ms Blakeman: My impression, again, is one about preparation. Two things happened for us. We ended up, I think, not asking the right questions, sometimes not having the right combination of ministries together to effectively address the issue that we were trying to get at. In almost all cases it just broke down into a mini estimates debate, where the ministers were asked an individual question, and they answered it very specifically from their own ministry rather than approaching it as a team on the floor.

It's a good idea. We need to pursue it, but I think all parties have to work a bit harder to figure out how to do this. I think that the ones that we felt were the most successful in the Official Opposition caucus we did a lot of front work on and met several times and laid out sort of more complex questions on how we were going to approach it, and that was a far more successful session.

I don't think there's anything structurally that we need to do. I think it's about preparation and for the ministers to figure out how they can approach it as a team on the floor and less individually. That would be my observations from that process.

9:05

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: I'd like to just do a bit of follow-up on that because I was one of the people in charge of sort of organizing how we presented ourselves on the floor during that process. I think we worked very hard to try to not make it a question period atmosphere. It was supposed to be one of real give-and-take and that we were prepared and not doing, for lack of a better word, puffball kinds of things, that we really got into the depth of the ministries. I think that where it kind of got complicated was when we did the cross-ministries. So if we did that prep work ahead of time, I think we could get into a little bit more depth, but we also could help each other not ask the same questions over and over again.

The process, when I was involved with it, the little bit that I did, I think was very good. I think that it forced us to probably do a lot more internal work and actually understand the ministries that we're talking to.

The Chair: Any other comments with respect to the cross-ministry part?

Okay, then, if I understand again correctly, the consensus would be that we just leave that alone for this next year and see how it works. Then it's for a future committee to deliberate and decide on.

Okay. Any other outstanding issues with respect to 59? Anybody have any thoughts on what was brought up as concerns that we haven't talked about?

Mr. Reynolds: Just to reiterate what you said at the last meeting, Mr. Chair – and I realize that the motion is to go ahead, but at some future date when the committee meets, perhaps later in 2008, one issue that you identified, I think, at the other meeting was quorum. That was one issue that you had identified, I believe, that the committee may want to consider at some time because there's no quorum requirement with respect to Committee of Supply.

I think the other issue that came up, whether it would be acted upon or not, is the use of what had been termed designated supply subcommittees in the past, whereby the Committee of Supply was broken up. The only reason I point that out is because in the table that was presented in the background information, it speaks to what other provinces do in that respect. Some use a system of dividing Committee of Supply. I realize that's not for this time, given the

nature of the motions, but it's something that you may want to be considered by a future committee.

The Chair: That's good to put that on the table for future consideration in the next rounds.

Seeing no other concerns being expressed by the committee, we have some things to do. A very short report will be brought here on Wednesday, and we'll approve it on Wednesday and then present it either Wednesday or Thursday.

Mr. Hancock: Better present it Wednesday if it's possible.

The Chair: Yes, I guess that's true.

I was just going to ask for clarification. This report will be presented to the Legislature as the report of this committee, correct?

Mr. Hancock: I would assume that if the report contains appropriate drafting, which I trust it might, then unanimous consent might have to be asked for a motion to be heard on Thursday to actually adopt the rule changes. I would anticipate that because I don't imagine that we could table the report – well, maybe we could table the report on Wednesday, but I won't have time to give notice of a government motion, which is the way that we would have to deal with implementing the report.

If the report is tabled Wednesday, then we would either need the unanimous consent to proceed Wednesday afternoon with a motion or Thursday with a motion, or I could give oral notice of a motion if tabling happens before. Then I could give oral notice of a motion to be heard on Thursday. Either way, it's prudent to table the report on Wednesday.

The Chair: So we'll approve it and truck it right over there and table it a few minutes afterwards. Okay?

No further comments?

Mrs. Forsyth: I move we adjourn.

The Chair: A motion to adjourn. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 9:11 a.m.]

