



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Privileges and Elections,
Standing Orders and Printing

Wednesday, October 8, 2008
1:35 p.m.

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**Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections,
Standing Orders and Printing**

Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC), Chair
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC), Deputy Chair

Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (L) *
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC) **
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liefert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC) ***
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP)
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC)
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC)
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC)

* substitution for Bridget Pastoor
** substitution for George Rogers
*** substitution for Frank Oberle

Also in Attendance

VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Louise J. Kamuchik	Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
Micheline S. Gravel	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Erin Norton	Committee Clerk
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Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Communications Services
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Rachel Stein	Research Officer
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Wednesday, October 8, 2008

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing to order, and I'd like to welcome all members and staff people. I think what we'll do first is have all members introduce themselves. I'll start with the ones on the phone, so if there's anyone on the phone, please introduce yourself first.

Mr. Taylor: This is Dave Taylor, MLA, Calgary-Currie.

The Chair: Thank you. Anyone else?

Now I'll go to my right, and we'll go around the table. Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Dave Hancock, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Marz: Richard Marz, MLA, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, on behalf of the hon. Frank Oberle from Peace River.

Mr. McFarland: Barry McFarland, Little Bow.

Mrs. Leskiw: Genia Leskiw, Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Naresh Bhardwaj, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Denis: Jonathan Denis, Calgary-Egmont, on behalf of George Rogers.

Mr. Berger: Evan Berger, Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Notley: Rachel Notley, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Senior Parliamentary Counsel, Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Stevens: Ron Stevens, Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Blakeman: Laurie Blakeman. I'd like to welcome you all to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'm here as the House leader for the Official Opposition, and I believe I'm also substituting for the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms DeLong: Alana DeLong, Calgary-Bow.

Mr. VanderBurg: George VanderBurg, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, standing in for Raj Sherman.

Mr. Liepert: Ron Liepert, Calgary-West.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Gene Zwozdesky, Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I just want to confirm once again that pursuant to temporary Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.4) we do have people substituting for others: Richard Marz for Frank Oberle, Laurie Blakeman for Bridget Pastoor, Jonathan Denis for George Rogers, and George VanderBurg for Raj Sherman.

I see that Raj Sherman is here as well. George, you might want to just stay for the pure pleasure of staying here. It's up to you.

Maybe, Raj, you could introduce yourself.

Dr. Sherman: I'm Raj Sherman, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. My apologies for being late.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next item on the agenda is the approval of the agenda, so if I can have a motion to approve the agenda. By Genia. All in favour? That is carried unanimously, I think.

Next on the agenda is the adoption of the minutes. We've all seen the minutes here. Do I have a motion to adopt the minutes? Ron Liepert. All in favour? Opposed? That's carried unanimously.

Then I think our very next item on the agenda is a discussion of the issues. I'll open it to the floor. I see that Dave has his hand up, so what I'll do is recognize Dave Hancock first.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. At the last meeting there were a number of presentations made, discussion, and documents tabled relative to various provisions for the standing orders. We've taken those away and had discussions – at least, I've had discussions – with our caucus members about some of the proposals and about items that might be brought forward. So I'm proposing to move a motion, that I think has been distributed, that

- (1) standing orders set out in schedule A attached be approved in principle and referred to Parliamentary Counsel with a request that standing order amendments be drafted to implement same;
- (2) Parliamentary Counsel be requested to draft standing order amendments corollary to those provided above in consultation with House leaders;
- (3) the Government House Leader be requested to consult with chairs of the policy field committees regarding rules which may be needed for policy field committees and, after consultation with opposition House leaders and Parliamentary Counsel, propose amendments to incorporate same;
- (4) the draft amendments be returned to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for approval and report to Assembly within the time frame required.

Mr. Chair, the reason I'm proposing the motion in that format is that, first of all, we do need to have drafted standing orders, but before they can be drafted, we have to agree on some of the principles behind them. The schedule A that I've attached to my motion deals with some but not all of the issues. So I want to just briefly indicate what's included and then what we've left out and why and where those ones might reappear.

First of all, there are several sections to it. The first section deals with dates and times of the session. We're proposing that there be a fixed sitting time, which starts on the first Monday of February in each year and will be anticipated to adjourn on or before the first Thursday in June. We've included the dates for the 2009 year.

A fall session is to start on the last Monday of October, anticipated to adjourn on or before the first Thursday in December. Now, if those full sessions were held, that would be approximately 76 days, I believe, that that adds up to. Of course, session can adjourn any time earlier if business has been dealt with.

The third piece is that session may be extended on a motion that would be on notice and nondebatable. This is in the rules now, but none of those rules would preclude the government from asking the Speaker to call a session at any time if it was determined to be needed.

Constituency weeks would be included in the calendar at the rate of approximately one per month. We're proposing the 2009 dates as

set out. In the 2007 Standing Orders, you may recall, we had a provision that a calendar would be filed by January 15 setting out the dates for the year, rather than saying it's the fourth week of every month, to allow some flexibility to align with appropriate calendar dates. For example, the dates that are suggested for this year align with the spring break in the school districts of Calgary and Edmonton. That's the type of flexibility you want to have. The idea would be slightly different from the 2007 Standing Orders, but in accordance with it a calendar would be filed by the Government House Leader with the Clerk's office by January 15 each year after consulting with opposition House leaders.

We're proposing to change the hours of sitting. There wasn't any desire that I could discern for people to go back to starting at 1 o'clock. However, if we do not have evening sittings, we could take the afternoon session to 6 o'clock, and doing so on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday allows us to adjourn a little bit earlier on Thursday, at 4:30, so that members from out of town could get home in time to still utilize the Thursday evening if they wished.

We are proposing – I see my numbering system went askew – that the Routine obviously commence at 1:30, with question period to commence at 1:50 and Orders of the Day to be called at 2:50, subject to points of order or emergency debate motions.

Going to the point of not having evening sittings, that means we have to deal with the issue of private members' business, so we're suggesting that private members' motions would be called at 4:55 on Monday afternoon. That gives the one hour for debate on a private member's motion and the five minutes to close. That's the process we'd use and would continue the practice that we have had of one motion per week.

That Routine and session setting time would provide that there aren't evening sittings, but evening sittings could be called again on a motion made on notice, nondebatable. If called, they would commence at 7:30 p.m. unless otherwise provided in the motion.

That deals with the issues around the sort of normal process of the day other than question period. There were some suggestions put forward last time that there should be a change in the allocation of questions. In discussion with our members there was a suggestion that perhaps changing the allocation of questions might be accommodated if there was some allowance for increased members' statements for private members on the government's side. That's still a matter of discussion, and we might anticipate that if there can be a resolution to that, something will be brought forward in that area. But there's not to my knowledge a resolution of that at the moment.

The second part of this has to do with how we deal with estimates, which is always the other big issue for the standing orders. We've tried a number of different ways of dealing with estimates over the past few years. In consultation with our members the proposal that met with the most support was that we should do as many other jurisdictions in the country do, and that is to refer our estimates to the policy field committees.

1:45

Each of the policy field committees now has responsibility for a number of departments and issues and legislation coming out of those departments. The estimates would be referred to that policy field committee for that department. The structure that's set up here is to suggest that policy field committees would meet after the budget is delivered. The policy field committees would meet in the evenings from 6:30 to 9:30 on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. They could sit no more than two per evening. That would allow the policy field committees to deal with the budget estimates within essentially a four- to five-week period.

Scheduled sittings would be done much the same as we do now. In other words, a schedule of sittings would be tabled in the House after consultation with the opposition and, as I've indicated in here, of course, because we're involving policy field committees, consultation with the chairs of the policy field committees.

Voting would still be done in the Legislature rather than the policy field committees so that every member would have the opportunity to vote on the estimates. Subject to discussion with the table as to how to do that most appropriately, you might retain Committee of Supply so that the reports would come back into Committee of Supply and the vote scheduled and rolled up on one day on estimates as we did in I think it was 2007 and perhaps again in 2008.

Provision would be made for exceptions. In other words, on one day's notice any member could give the Clerk notice of a vote that they wanted to have pulled out of the main vote. Of course, if there were any amendments that were brought forward to the budget, those amendments, presumably, would be brought forward in the committee, but then they would be deemed tabled, and they would come back in the House for voting.

Once voting started – again, this is the same process as we used before – it would continue until it was completed. I've put in a provision that says that after the first bells have rung on a scheduled vote – the first bell would be 10 minutes to make sure that everybody knew that there was a vote going on, but thereafter because all the votes are happening sequentially, the bells would be reduced to one minute.

We had a provision in the 2007 standing orders which provided that responses to questions would be delivered within a reasonable time, 14 sitting days. I propose to put that back in.

In establishing a process, there's been some confusion in the past about the time frame, so what we're saying is that the process in the committee for estimates would be up to 10 minutes for opening remarks by the minister, which is the normal course now. The following 60 minutes would be opposition time. That's not all opposition time, of course. That's 10 minutes for opposition, then 10 minutes for response or combined question-and-answer time as we've been doing; 20 minutes for the third party – and, again, that's not 20 minutes for the New Democrats; that's 10 minutes and 10 minutes, but it can be combined for sharing – and then the remainder open to all members.

Upon completion of the three hours of committee there would not be a requirement to go back to the House because it's not a Committee of Supply. The committee would be deemed to report, and the estimates report would then come up during the vote. So that's the proposal relative to estimates.

With respect to policy field committees there was some concern, I think mainly raised by the table officers, relative to the procedural rules. We've had some discussion. Everybody agrees that procedures should be clear, so the concept that we're recommending here is that we just work with Parliamentary Counsel to make sure the language is clear. I don't think there's any dispute around what happens with bills; it's just a question of language.

There was a suggestion. Most Legislatures appoint members of the policy field committees for the duration of the Legislature, so we're proposing to do that but not make any change to the provision for substitution of members so that members can be substituted on the committee at any time. Membership changes could be made by motion, but I've also put a proviso in here that if we can come to an accommodation with the table officers with respect to how that might be done on an administrative basis, we could put in place an administrative process for that.

There's been some confusion in the standing orders about the minority reports. It was put in in 2007. It was omitted in one draft

of 2008 and included in another. I'm proposing that it be in and that the provision that requires a response to policy field committee reports where necessary – I say where necessary because, obviously, if the policy field committee is reporting a bill, it's not necessary to respond to that, but if there's a report on an issue or regulations, then it would be necessary to report. So I think the provision put forward by the table officers was that there needs to be a clarification. I think the clarification was around if the 158 days expired outside of session, you could table with the Clerk.

There were a few other provisions that were raised. One was just clarifying the rules around closing the debate. Sometimes a member moves a bill on behalf of another member, on behalf of the sponsor, and it just needs to be clarified that then either the sponsor or the member who moved closes debate.

Provide some flexibility around the date draws for private members' bills and motions.

Clarify the process for tabling responses to written questions and motions for returns. Right now, actually, the rule is honoured in the breach in that it requires copies of the written questions' responses to be sent to all House leaders as well as the mover of the question and a couple of copies tabled, and that's a bit excessive.

Also, authorizing the destruction of ballots upon completion.

Two issues that I didn't deal with in here. One, as I mentioned, was the question period issue. The other was an issue around the five-minute question and answer after speakers. The proposal that was put forward was that that be extended to the mover and the next speaker. Right now those two are excluded from the five-minute question-and-answer period. In discussion with colleagues there was a considerable amount of opinion expressed that we should delete the five-minute question and answer and others who preferred the status quo. I've chosen at this point not to deal with it but might anticipate that there may be some discussion on that here. If there's direction, that could come from this table, or we might bring back something further on that in the near future.

I think those are the two main issues, but if I've missed any, I'd be open to that.

Once we deal with this piece, I would propose to move a second motion with respect to tablings because that was another issue that was raised. The motion there, as has been distributed, will suggest that we examine the practice of tablings and bring that back for some further and other discussion.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much.

Before we move on, I want to recognize three additional members that have arrived. I wonder if you could introduce yourselves, Jeff, Moe, and Pearl.

Mr. Johnson: Jeff Johnson, Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Amery: Moe Amery, Calgary-East.

The Chair: I see that Pearl just left, so she'll have to introduce herself in a minute.

We have two motions on the table, and I believe that there could be some discussion on this.

Mr. Hancock: Just one on the table so far.

The Chair: Okay. You've suggested the next one, but we've got one on the table. We'll deal with the next one when we've finished with the first one.

I think, Laurie, you had your hand up first.

Ms Blakeman: I do. A two-parter, please, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask that the motion that's been put before me be severed into four component parts for the purpose of voting, please. I will reference *Beauchesne* 688, page 205, with the tradition of severing when requested.

Second, your advice, Mr. Chair. I would like to give a formal reaction to this as the House leader for the Official Opposition. May I proceed?

The Chair: That would be appropriate.

1:55

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, I'm feeling very David today against Goliath, but here we go. This is our official reaction, and I'm just going to run through this in the order that it appears for you in your documentation so that it's easier for you to follow along.

We have always wanted to see a firm starting date, so we're pleased to see a schedule set out of when we would anticipate beginning session. We approve of that.

I have always urged caution to my colleague the Government House Leader about a firm end date for fear that we get into a situation of überclosure, where the government is able to insist that all bills be finished by the close date. Therefore, I have asked that we use language around anticipating an end date but nothing that is absolutely firm. Of course, the government always gives itself an out either to start earlier or end earlier or go later, and it's entitled to do that.

However, I will raise an issue with the nondebatable portion that is being inserted into this. I fail to see why the government would be alarmed about a little bit of debate on a motion on extending a session. I don't see what it would be afraid of there, and I would urge it to remove the nondebatable portion of section 1(c).

The constituency week was something that had come out of the 2007 negotiations between myself and the Government House Leader. We don't particularly need the two-week break that is being anticipated for this year. I have some issues around that and some caution because it is taking two weeks out of prime budget debate time. I don't want to see us being rushed through a budget debate because we've now lost two weeks to a spring break somewhere. In that case, we would be very happy to take a one-week break matching either the Edmonton school break or the Calgary school break – we don't care – but two weeks is a lot to lose.

The suggested sitting hours are fine with us, extending it to 6 o'clock at night. The QP starting at 1:50: I know the government was seeking certainty there, and that's fine with us. However, writing in that Orders of the Day will be "called at 2:50 subject only to points of order or emergency debate motions": I'd like to hear what the reason is for that because a hard-and-fast rule in there usually takes away from the flexibility of the House. I'd like to know why that was added.

We have been willing to support the private member business at one motion a week; that's fine.

Evening sessions called at 7:30 if they're called: again, I question why the government feels the need to have that as a nondebatable motion. What are you worried about? There are only nine of us. It's just a little bit of debate. Surely you can handle that.

Now, when we look at section 2, which is around estimates, I cannot state strongly enough our absolute objection to this on a number of bases. I think the idea of moving the main estimates supply debate from the Legislative Assembly, where we have generally a duty caucus of 25-plus people in the Assembly, easily accessible by members of the public – and, of course, the media are in the same building – to one of two, well, smallish committee

rooms in which there's very limited seating for the public or, indeed, the media if they wish to attend and watch us: we really object to that.

Frankly, I think it's a very bad idea for this government. If it wants to be seen trying to take budget debate in these economic times out of the Legislative Assembly and trying to stick it in a difficult, hard-to-find place, I'm sure that you will hear from people about that because people are certainly alive right now to the current economic happenings, and any suggestion of sort of backrooms, smaller rooms, more difficult to get at or to witness people talking about the budget is not going to fly. We believe that this debate is a main function of the Legislative Assembly and should take place in the Legislative Assembly, not be shunted off to another building somewhere else with, as I say, very little accommodation for guests, be that the public or the media.

I understand that we don't often get a huge audience to watch us debate budgets, but we have had at times, and that would be very difficult to accommodate in this room, for example, where I can see about nine to a dozen seats that would be available for members of the public and the media. I think this makes the process of the budget debate less transparent, less accountable, less accessible. I mean, in the last fiscal year, '07-08, Alberta exceeded Ontario's per capita spending by 38 per cent and exceeded B.C.'s per capita spending by 28 per cent. I think the public wants to see where the government is spending the money.

A short history of the policy field committees has shown them to be very quick to deny opposition research requests, to vote as a bloc against all but one suggestion from the opposition. The policy field committees have not been thus far, in my opinion, demonstrated to be a great democratic tool. So we really think this is a bad idea to move it out of the Legislative Assembly. What appears to be in front of us today is the concept that there would be a doubling up of budget debates, which, again, requires that as an opposition member and as an Official Opposition member I now have to choose between whether I'm going to represent my constituents or whether I'm going to represent one of my three portfolio assignments. This is why we abandoned this practice before: it's simply undemocratic.

I know the Government House Leader referenced a number of other provinces and the federal government where budget debates do happen in committee. I look at the numbers and, well, in Alberta 27 per cent represents the opposition percentage compared to the government. Federally that's 58 per cent; in Manitoba it's 36 per cent; in B.C. 40 per cent. In all of those, if you want to look at real numbers, the actual opposition numbers are federally 177 people, Manitoba 21 people, Saskatchewan 20 people, and B.C. 32 people. In the Official Opposition here there are nine people plus two in the third party, 11 people total. It works in the other places because you have more people doing it. Here you're expecting nine people plus two in the third party to be in two places at once and to try to carry out three different jobs, and it's simply not doable for us. We feel very strongly that this is an antidemocratic move which, hearkening back to the words of the Premier before and after the election, shows me a very different story after the election than before.

The number of hours that are also being limited here: out of those three-hour sessions the opposition gets about one hour. I heard the Government House Leader mention that this should go through in four to five weeks, and I question why that arbitrary timing. If we're here to debate a \$35 billion budget, what's the rush? We should be able to take the time to actually examine it. In other provinces – and I'll let my colleague from the New Democratic Party talk about some examples she's raised – where there is no time limit on debate for a particular ministry, they keep going until they're done. It comes back day after day until they're done asking questions about

it. Here I believe that under what's being put in front of us, there would not even be an opportunity for the opposition to question every ministry. This is far from what we were asking for. I mean, just try to imagine debating \$35 billion in an hour – well, two hours is what they're saying in any given evening – over a period of four weeks. We're not going to get through 24 ministries, and we're going to be trying to debate about a billion dollars an hour. That is not good representation for the people.

Again, I raise the issue of why we have to do this in such a hurry. The government has never shown any great desire to have the budget passed before the beginning of the fiscal year, which is the 1st of April, and I'm wondering if that's the reason why there's such a short timeline being given to do this. I don't see any reason why you need to double up those committees every night. It certainly makes it a physical difficulty for the opposition to manage to be in two places at the same time and to perform the job that's been given to us by the citizens and by the Assembly. So we very much object to what is being put forward here.

2:05

I will also note that under 2(e) the responses before were to be provided within 14 days, not 14 sitting days. At the rate this is being put together and following on the four-week timeline for total budget debate, we would only be hearing back from one week's worth of debate, so possibly three to six ministries, before we're expected to vote on it, and we would not have had a higher number of ministries respond to us with any questions they've been unable to answer in the one hour that they could take our questions. It wasn't 14 sitting days before; it was 14 days. I'd ask that that be repaired, please.

We're not too keen on 3(b), that section where the policy field committee members are appointed for the duration of the Legislature. As I said, we've not found the policy field committees to be very all party or very democratic.

Again, I'll refer the minister to the 2007 standing orders, in which under 68(2) it reads:

The report of a committee is the report as determined by the committee as a whole or the majority of it but shall include any dissenting or minority reports concerning the report or parts of it.

That's under the subheading of Committee Reports and Documents. It does not narrow itself to the policy field committees; it covers all committees. I would like that as per our agreement in May of '08 to be brought forward in the same format. This is narrowing it, and I don't agree with it.

We would also object to authorizing the destruction of ballots upon completion of voting for the presiding officers.

That's a very quick reaction to what the government has brought forward. A number of issues that the opposition had asked to be considered were not addressed. Seeing as we're now setting the standing orders for the next four years, we can look at them not being addressed over the entire Legislature. That includes things like the ability of the Official Opposition and the third party to bring forward current issues or current policies to be debated on the floor. We've now had to submit our private members' bills as of a month ago, approximately, and those are what we will have to work with the entire next year, so our ability to get current events up for debate is very, very limited. We were looking for a mechanism to be able to do that on a regular basis, and there's been no provision for that.

I've talked about sufficient time for opposition members to question ministers on supply budgets – one hour does not cover a multibillion dollar budget – and specific allocations for members of the Official Opposition and the third-party opposition for private member's bill positioning.

There are certainly some things in here that we can support, but there are a number of things that we view as particularly draconian,

and I would ask members of the committee to not support what has been brought forward. I am very happy to answer any questions that anyone has of me.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I don't know if you want to respond to it directly, Dave, or we might ask Rachel. She had her hand up as well to maybe comment first, and then we can cover both off.

Go ahead, please.

Ms Notley: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will I think be brief, or I'll try to be. I always start out by saying I'll be brief, and then it turns out later that people are falling asleep in their chair and I actually went on forever. Nonetheless, I'll try to be brief.

What I'll do, maybe, is start where the Member for Edmonton-Centre left off. I won't go through it in detail, but as you know, both opposition parties made a presentation to this committee at the last meeting laying out a number of initiatives that we would like to have seen this committee give some serious consideration to. Without getting into a detailed inventory of them, I would say this: I think the proposals that we put forward were designed to expand the breadth and the nature of the debate by giving the opposition an ever so slight opportunity to put a topic on the floor whereas typically we're responding to one that comes from the government. Of course, it would have been a minute opportunity for us to actually put a topic on the floor periodically, but it would have as a result expanded and allowed us to have a greater breadth of debate.

Another proposal that we had put forward was to have the Assembly be more responsive in its debate to current events in terms of giving greater opportunities for us to respond in the emergency debate area of the rules as key current events were presented to all Albertans. Again, that particular opportunity appears to have been rejected.

Then, of course, the other thing that we talked about was just various and sundry efforts to enhance our participation and to make it easier for us to play our role as opposition from almost an administrative point of view and to maintain some semblance of balance within the Assembly.

That's basically what our overall proposals went to, and pretty much none of them found their way into this proposal that's before you. As I said, I won't go through them in great detail. They're appended to the minutes from the last committee meeting, so they're there, and you know what I'm speaking about.

I'm going to just limit my comments at this point to the discussion around estimates because clearly we're at a place here where, you know, most of the horses are already out of the barn, so we're just sort of doing a bit of damage control. With respect to the estimate process, as you can imagine, what's on the table here is completely unworkable for our caucus. It is a process which is effectively structured to negate our participation in probably half of the budget debate. It's a clear outcome of what's on the table right now that that will happen, and I frankly don't think that reflects well at all on the Assembly, let alone the government, that ultimately controls the decision-making process in terms of all of us. It is simply not possible for us to be in two rooms at the same time.

Now, last meeting I did raise the fact that there were some jurisdictions where there were concurrent committees functioning. However, those jurisdictions were the ones, as I believe the Member for Edmonton-Centre already mentioned, where there was no time limit on how long those estimates could go. So it was possible to move around in a reasonably effective way. Of course, even in those jurisdictions you didn't have an opposition as small as what we have here.

By having your very, very tight time limits, I think unprecedentedly short time limits with respect to the amount of debate that is allowed for each ministry with respect to their budgets, and then combining that with concurrent committees, it makes it virtually impossible for the NDP caucus to fully participate in budget debate. So that's the clear outcome. It's an intentional outcome. It's a decision to shut us out of significant parts of the budget debate, and I would suggest, as I did before, that that doesn't reflect well on, you know, what it is we're trying to do here.

With respect to why it might be that we need to be there, I know we had a bit of a discussion before on whether one might actually think there's a difference in our roles between simply elected members versus being opposition members. As you know, not only do I need to be in a budget debate on behalf of my constituents as, of course, we all do, but I also have critic areas. I have, I believe, 13 critic areas. So to suggest that I could possibly contribute to the debate – and I'm sure many of you will say: ah, well, you haven't yet anyway, so what's the difference? Fair enough. Nonetheless, I should be given the opportunity to improve, and it won't happen in this setting. I think that fundamentally what you're talking about here is a tremendous step backwards. It's a clear exclusion of our caucus from the process.

As has already been mentioned, the other key factor in what's being proposed here is that it's removing this debate from the Assembly, which I think is also a very negative step backwards. I don't think the optics are ones which I'd want to defend anyway to my constituents, the idea of taking budget debate, you know, a billion dollars an hour, and moving it into a room this size, in which, if you remember how many ministry officials typically show up for budget debate, actually, I don't believe there will be any seats left here for the public to come in and observe. Frankly, from a very pragmatic point of view, I think you have a problem with optics in terms of how this will look.

2:15

At the end of the day, I suppose, from the perspective of a government that's doing everything it can to maintain its control on the process, that's what this will achieve, but from the perspective of a government that actually wants their constituents to believe that they are trying to enhance transparency and democracy and open up the system, this flies in the face of that objective. I would urge you to think back to that second objective and to recommit yourselves to that. I think you've got a fairly firm handle in terms of the level of control you have, and you needn't be that concerned. As I say, I'm not going to nitpick most of this stuff because it's really the estimates process. You know what it is that's not in here already, and there's not really a great deal.

The only other thing, of course, is the unmanageability of the 9 o'clock in the morning till 9 o'clock at night. That flies in the face of the notion of making this job remotely attractive to anybody who has any obligations outside of this room, family obligations or whatever those might be. Whether you call it in the House or not in the House, the 12-hour day is a little bit unmanageable.

Anyway, I'll leave it at that. I think all of my points have already been made, so I'll try not to belabour it too much. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think that for the record I will maybe ask Pearl to introduce herself as well. Welcome.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. I'm MLA Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dave, do you want to respond to some of these comments?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Chair. Yes, I would. I think that, first of all, most of the comments have been around the estimates, so I'll deal with that first. One of the primary concerns that seems to have been raised – there have been a number of them – and one of the first is in terms of location. There is nothing in this which would preclude one of the policy field committees, presumably perhaps the one that was dealing with the largest budget, from meeting in the Legislature with all of the galleries available. It doesn't have to be in this room.

But I would indicate that even if it was in committee room A or committee room B, we have not had an experience of huge hordes of people coming to watch budget debates. In fact, it's hard to keep even the people who are supposed to be watching the budget debates awake during most of them. It's not to say that it's not an important process; it's an extremely important process. I would agree that one of the most important processes that can happen by legislative members is holding the government to account for its budget. But in a modern era, where even the media, if they're listening at all, are listening on streaming audio from their offices, the fact that we met in a committee room is not that, quite frankly, material to the public. You're not hiding at all from the public. It's on the public record, it's in the public face, and it's available to anyone who wants to appear either in person or to listen in on the computer. I don't think that's a valid reason not to go to committee when most parliamentary jurisdictions across this country do deal with the debate in committee.

So why go to committee? Well, the committees theoretically are going to build up some expertise on their departments. Because the committees have a few departments that they deal with the legislation on and that they potentially deal with the issues from and regulations from and have research capacity – we did afford, when we set up the policy field committees, research budgets to assist – they can be useful from that perspective. There are a number of very good reasons why policy field committees would be a more effective place for members to debate the budget.

In terms of the amount more time is afforded under this proposal than in almost any other manner in which the House has dealt with budget debates. Each of these hearings are set up for three hours. You'll recall that in the past there were some three-hour and some two-hour sittings. This affords, I think, if the numbers are correct, about 75 hours of debate, which is more than the 60 of the last two years and certainly more than has been afforded in the past, when each department appeared for either an afternoon or an evening. So it's actually more time. It is available to the public; there's no attempt to make it backroom.

Then the question of whether members of the opposition can actually appear. Well, the reality for both government and opposition is that in budget debates those who are participating tend to be there. In fact, there isn't one bill or motion that everybody in the House gets to participate on. We tend to delegate. We tend to work with our colleagues and allow our colleagues to raise issues for us. In the opposition we have opposition critics, but not every member comes to every budget debate, every estimate debate to raise the issues of their constituents. It hasn't happened in my 11 years in the House and certainly in the 20-some years before that, when I watched the House rather closely, and I dare say that it's not going to happen going forward, whether we use this process or the process we used last year or other processes.

To say that you have to be at every committee hearing is just not the reality that you've worked with over the last two terms at least

and over the last four terms. It's not the reality. In fact, you in the opposition do as government does; that is, have some people who participate in each thing, a few who try to participate in more than others. But, by and large, 83 members do not participate in all debates. To suggest that we have to design a system that would allow for 83 members to participate in all debates is just not really dealing with the practical realities of how the work is done in the House.

We did have a discussion about format, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has indicated starting at 9:30 in the morning. That's not part of the proposal here. I'm not sure if you're referring to the proposal which suggested that if the committee sat one at a time, you could have a 9:30 to 11 in the morning and then an evening one. That would allow one committee sitting at a time but actually has fewer hours of debate. When I didn't get a favourable response to either, I had to choose one and chose to bring forward the proposal which would give more hours of debate, the two concurrent committees in the evening, providing 75 hours as opposed to the three and two, which only provided for about 62 hours.

In terms of why motions are nondebatable, it's been my experience and view and I would suggest to the table that when a motion is administrative and not policy, debate is just an opportunity to waste the House's time. When we're talking about the business of the House in terms of when it can be heard, essentially it is in the government's hands to call the House for business, to call the session. We're trying under this process to constrain that somewhat by saying that it's in members' best interests to know when they're going to be called, and it's in members' best interests to be able to plan their lives.

To set some time frames in terms of start dates and anticipated finish dates is a good thing, to set constituency weeks is a good thing, and to set anticipated hours of sitting is a good thing, but it's always got to be alive to the government to say that if the business can't be done within that time frame, we need to extend the hours. Obviously, we want to be able to give members notice of the extension of hours. The reason you're extending the hours is to get the business done that needs to be done. To use House time on government business to debate whether you should have more time to debate government business would seem to be nonsensical. It's an administrative motion. It should be nondebatable.

I think that deals with most of the items. There was a question about the sitting days. I apologize; that was an error on my part. If that could be seen as a friendly amendment, I would ask that we remove "sitting" from in front of "days" in 2(e).

The reports from committees and minority reports: that was intended to be all committees. I think that's the way it was set up before, but that could be dealt with as we actually refine the standing orders and bring them back. There may even be some debate around that at that time.

I'm not sure if there were other issues that I needed to respond to. I think those are the ones I wanted to respond to, Mr. Chair.

2:25

Going to Orders of the Day at 2:50. I'll be really frank. There has been lots of discussion about the whole issue of the best use of time and about tabling of documents. The opposition in their proposals had a reference to guaranteeing the tabling of documents or not interfering with it. Members on all sides of the House have been talking about this issue for a long time. My view is and my next motion will suggest that we ask legislative officers to look at what's happened in jurisdictions with respect to tablings. Rather than use up a lot of House time on tablings – that's usually at the end of the

Routine; I'm not trying to hide anything here – I'm suggesting that we should have a time when we finish the Routine and go to the business of the day so that you have a period of time, particularly on Mondays, so that you're not constrained and you get the private members' business time in. It's also for the other days as well in terms of government business time so that you have that time available.

There's no constraint on tablings, I would argue, because anything you don't table today, you can very easily table tomorrow. I do think that in the long run – and that's the benefit of having a look at it – we've got to come to some understanding of what's appropriate to be tabled. I would say intuitively, having been a bit of student of this, that in most jurisdictions tablings are for official reports. They're not for all the letters you may have ever received from a constituent. Now, there may be appropriate ways and appropriate times to get constituents' views on the table, and that's one of the reasons why we have probably the laxest tabling rules in the parliamentary system, but I think there's got to be a balance on that. I think the immediate concept of moving to Orders of the Day at a set time doesn't preclude tablings, but it doesn't allow tablings to be utilized to push the business of the Legislature back.

The Chair: That's it?

Mr. Hancock: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Laurie.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Well, I'll start with the end first. I truly view that clause to call Orders of the Day at 2:50 as the most insidious thing I've seen in this document. That is a government's attempt to limit the voices of citizens, whether they be asking us to present petitions on their behalf, and if they send a petition to every single one of us, those petitions should appear in the House. This is now going to say: "Oh, no. Sorry. Not yours. Not today or maybe not ever." This limits the voices of the citizens of the province, and I feel very strongly that that is wrong.

If you have a problem with tablings, then deal with it. If this is about administration or archival storage of those documents that are coming in from constituents, then deal with that problem, but don't limit Albertans speaking through their MLAs to the Assembly and asking that their document be tabled or that their petition be presented. That's what's going to happen with this because from the end of question period at approximately 2:30, for 20 minutes that's all that's left, and if the government decides they're going to present 15 bills, which has happened before, each with their little statement, that can easily take up 15 minutes of time, which would mean that potentially there could be no tablings or petitions that day.

This, in my view, is a particularly destructive and antidemocratic manoeuvre by the government to shut out citizens and to keep Albertans out of the Assembly, and I cannot disagree more strongly with it. It limits it. I thought that's what you were up to, and that's what you were all up to. It's very wrong, in my opinion.

I have raised in this context and in a number of others the number of ways in which the opposition is limited in how it raises issues in the House. Our debate time and the speaking times have been cut. When we have to have our bills in is, you know, seven months or five months in advance of when they actually get up in the Assembly if they get up at all. We've got very limited budget debates. That's one of the few ways we have of bringing an urgent issue to the floor and allowing the voices of Albertans to be heard. To now limit them, I cannot express how bad I think that is on behalf of govern-

ment to be disrespecting Albertans in that way. I just think it's absolutely flat out wrong.

The Chair: Alana had her hand up, and then we'll go back to Dave.

Ms DeLong: I just wondered whether anybody had any statistics in terms of the average amount of time that we spend doing tablings.

The Chair: Go ahead, Dave.

Mr. Hancock: No, I don't have any statistics on that. It certainly varies, I mean, from almost none to lengthy depending on the issues of the day, perhaps, and the amount of paper that has come in. The reality is that there is no limit to tablings under our current rules, which are in my view – and I say I'd like to see the research on it – the most, dare I say, liberal in the parliamentary jurisdictions. The fact of the matter is that we have a Tablings to the Clerk provision, so there is nothing that I'm aware of which stops anybody from tabling any document with the Clerk's office and certainly nothing which stops people from bringing them the next day.

Petitions, of course, have to be in appropriate form to be petitions. There is nothing which requires a petition which is, in effect, exactly the same petition from being aggregated and tabled as a petition as opposed to having every member of the opposition table one page of it. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre protests way too much. If people really saw what was going on with respect to tablings, which isn't the most important issue on the table today – the fact of the matter is that they are dragged out from time to time, where it's exactly the same petition that member after member will read into the record and then table. The reality is that that is just a technique. If you want to get the petition into the official record, there's ample opportunity to do it through Routine tablings and through Tablings to the Clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe I see Rachel's hand up. Go ahead, please.

Ms Notley: Well, just on the issue of the tabling. As the junior half of our caucus who, of course, is repeatedly sitting around at that time still in the House with this pile of stuff to be tabled, I challenge you to find any point in time where I took more than 15 seconds to table a document. I really don't think it's an issue. I mean, I'm half of the opposition, so I find it hard to imagine that it's really that much of a problem.

Just to go back to the estimates debate a little bit, just a couple of small points which I forgot to point out last time. Under your proposed 2(c) you're talking about scheduling, and you have Opposition House Leader as who the consultation would be with. Now, obviously, notwithstanding that not all of your members are going to go to all estimates in order to represent their constituencies, as I've said, you know, we do still function in a parliamentary democracy. We do still have a role for opposition. We do still have an obligation to go in our role as critics. Trying to co-ordinate that becomes much more difficult, so I would just assume that that should be House leaders in terms of the consultation. Otherwise, it just becomes ridiculous in even beginning to try and get there.

Yes, I know that that's not the way it was before, but if what you're suggesting is that one opposition party which has two members is going to try and fulfill its role of engaging in their critic job, we simply need to know when what is coming up. Of course, the other thing that you forget is that we're theoretically part of these policy field committees themselves. That was part of our other job, or that was part of the whole "aren't we being democratic?" song

and dance that we heard. Now, to be a member of the committee and then to also be going to a different committee to do estimates – I mean, you have to see what the problem is here. It's just not doable. In any event there should be some attempt to co-ordinate with us as well.

With respect to the item on minority reports I do believe the standing order as it currently reads does refer to reports in plural, and that should not be lost in this translation here. I suspect that there might even be occasions when members of the government party on behalf of their constituents might feel the need to engage in articulating a minority opinion when a policy field committee makes a report. I assume you would want there to be the opportunity for there to be more than one minority report, and my understanding is that that's a reflection of what's currently in the standing orders.

2:35

I mean, I know you said that nobody goes to these estimates and nobody cares and all that kind of stuff. I would just suggest that that might be why it is we had 40 per cent turnout in this election last time and that, you know, instead of buying into that, you might want to actually try and do something to undermine that trend and reverse it.

I certainly know that our caucus didn't make it to all estimates last time. No question about it. I think we made it to about two-thirds to three-quarters, and I think I participated in eight or nine different estimates debates. I'm not sure exactly, but that is what we try to do, and not on behalf of our constituents but in our role as opposition. It simply will not be possible for us to do that again if we have concurrent committees, so you will significantly reduce the opposition input in this debate.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Would you like to respond, Dave?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chair, just briefly, in terms of the attempt to co-ordinate, you're right that the reflection in here is a reflection of the past practice, and that is that the Government House Leader consulted with the opposition. In fact, in some iterations it was the opposition who provided the schedule in consultation with the Government House Leader. Our normal practice, I believe – and if it's not, it would be my intent – would be to make sure that the third party was included in knowing what was going on. Rather than a sign-off piece, it's basically talking about a consultation because the more people you get into the process – our process last year worked very well, I thought, where we provided a schedule of times when ministries could be available, and from that the opposition designated which times they wanted.

Ms Notley: But you weren't talking about doing them at the same time. Come on. It's a fundamentally different process now that you're talking about.

Mr. Hancock: I don't think the scheduling is necessarily fundamentally different, and I think there are some very easy ways of dealing with some of the issues relative to, you know, scheduling one of the larger budgets perhaps to sit in the House and then one of the smaller budgets to sit in the committee room.

In terms of the question of being available to be on two committees, under the standing orders all of us are available at any time that the House is in, so I'm not sure what the argument is there. We are in theory required to attend when called to do so by the Speaker, and when the call goes out and the session comes in, it's our first obligation to be here. What we're trying to do is create a schedule that makes life a little easier by not being here most evenings. This

provides for a set period of time for the budget estimate debates, to try and do that within a reasonable time so that, again, people can be home at a reasonable hour and live a reasonable life. You know, I suppose if we were to have one sitting at a time, we could double the amount of time, and then one would never have evenings to go home or to do other things.

There's balance in everything, and that's what this attempts to achieve: some balance. But to say that you can't be there, the bottom line is that when the House is open, that's our first priority. So if the House is sitting in the evenings, presumably you'd want to be there.

Ms Notley: My point is that if there is a committee I sit on and then there's another committee that's dealing with estimates that I'm the critic for, it's not a question of – I mean, maybe there's been a scientific development that I somehow missed along the way about how you'd be in two places at once. That's what I'm talking about.

Mr. Hancock: It's called asking your hon. seatmate to go to the other committee as a substitute – we've made liberal provisions, again, for the substitution of members – while you're going to the one that you're critic on, or vice versa.

Ms Notley: No, it doesn't work that way. That's why there's a need for co-ordination as well because of the different critic areas. I mean, I don't believe many of your backbenchers are planning on spending three hours every night sitting in on every policy field committee in estimates.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Could I get a clarification from the Government House Leader, please? There has been some reference, without a clear designation, to how long it's expected these budget debates would take at three evenings a week, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, sitting from 6:30 to 9:30 and two committees at the same time. We don't have a designated start date for the budget, which we did have before but not included this time, just the throne speech. Is there an end date to this that the government anticipates but has not put on the table? I'd like to hear what it was.

Mr. Hancock: I'm not sure what you mean by an end date, but presumably if there are 24 departments and one per committee sitting and six sittings a week if you had three days and two at a time, that would be four weeks.

Ms Blakeman: What is to stop us from holding one committee meeting; in other words, three a week and going for a longer period of time in order to accommodate the 24 ministries?

Mr. Hancock: Well, two reasons for that. One was that there was a desire for us to reduce the evening sittings as much as possible, and the other was a clear expression on it on your side not to have sittings in the morning. So if we're trying to do it as few evenings as possible and we don't do it in the morning, that leads us to believe that two at a time for four weeks is a beautiful compromise.

Ms Blakeman: Except that it's been clearly pointed out to you that for the opposition, the Official Opposition and the third-party opposition, this is a hardship, and it is very difficult to organize. So we have put that in front of you. I fail to see why we cannot conduct these in a reasonable period of time and why it needs to be doubled up like that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Heather, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have been sitting here listening very intently and taking some notes. I guess I want to start off with the tabling. I'm going to go back in history a little bit to a young, new MLA sending newsletters out to all of my constituents and putting reports in the community newsletters and repeatedly, continually asking constituents – I have probably one of the highest-educated constituencies in the province – that if they had any questions that they would like me to ask, if they had any members' statements they would like me to make, if they had at that particular time any recognitions they would like me to make, please let me know. I also asked them about tabling.

I look back since being here in '93 at the amount of tablings that I have been asked to do by my constituents, and I can tell you that it's slim to none, yet the offer has always been there. I have in the past tabled some petitions on requests from my constituents. It was always amazing to me to watch over the last several years the amount of tablings that the opposition tabled day after day and tabling after tabling and a letter from a constituent, and we could go on and on.

You know, while I appreciate what they're trying to talk about and democracy, I think with the recommendation that the House leader is making, let the table officers do some stats in regard to what kind of tablings are tabled. What's happening in other jurisdictions, to me, is a fair compromise at this particular time. Our table officers have done a wonderful job in the past of providing data, and I think they could probably do a very thorough job of the type of tabling that is happening. As David has mentioned, it has been very, very liberal in the past compared to what other jurisdictions are doing as far as their tabling.

You know, I can appreciate that there are some tablings that have to be done. As chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it's a requirement to have that tabled. I am actually quite interested to find out what the table officers do find out is happening in other jurisdictions. That's my first comment.

The second, I guess, is more general in regard to what has been laid out from the House leader in regard to schedule A and the motions in the standing orders. You know, politics is about fairness. I think Dave has elaborated on some of the issues that have been brought up by both opposition members in regard to the increase in the hours, which has always been a pet peeve. I may bring up the fact that there was discussion that 60 hours wasn't fair enough, so now he's talking about bringing it to 75 hours.

The firm starting dates Ms Blakeman agrees on, but she doesn't like the idea of an anticipated closing date. Well, quite frankly, I want to get home to my family. I would like to make some plans. I would like to know that if my son decides to get married in July, I can say: yup, I can give you a week of my life in July when you get married because I know by what the House leader has anticipated and brought forward on this that June 4, 2009, is the end of session. So I can say, "Yup, you can get married in July, and I'll be there," and I won't be dragging my butt all over the place because I've been working hundreds of hours and I'm tired. It gives me the opportunity to be able to make some plans around my life.

2:45

The constituency weeks. It was kind of a "yes" or "no," and I was concerned about the two-week break. You know, we talk about trying to attract younger people into the Legislature. When there's a constituency break, whether you live in Edmonton or Calgary, at least if you have a small family like Raj and some of my other

colleagues, during a constituency break he can at least say: well, I've got a week that I can spend with my children, and I live in Edmonton. If it's somebody like Rob Anderson, who has three young children and happens to live in the city of Calgary, he can spend some time with his children in Calgary. So, you know, no matter where you live, it allows you to spend some time with your children.

The evening sessions obviously are a pet peeve of mine and, I'm sure, many of my other colleagues because I don't think, quite frankly, that many of us function when, as a former minister, we're starting at 7 in the morning. I can tell you that by 9 o'clock at night I'm toast. I can sit back and watch people around me, and I'm wondering if their brain is even functioning at that point in time.

Mr. Stevens: What time of day?

Mrs. Forsyth: Nine at night.

You know, in all fairness, I think that there has obviously been a lot of work done. I was one of the people that responded back to the House leader. Some of the things that I thought were good ideas, like morning sessions, aren't here, but I think, again, it goes back to fair compromise. Honestly, I can appreciate what both Rachel and Laurie have said about the committee structure and the policy field committees and trying to be in two places at once, but I think it was the House leader that indicated that that's when you have to share some responsibilities. I know that when you only have two, Rachel, it's a little difficult. There are a whole bunch more of us than you.

We've got some city members in here. We're going through business plan processes right now. Quite frankly, some of the government members want to be at all of them. So I think they're starting at 8 in the morning, and I know some of our newer colleagues are running to every single one of them to be able to participate in the business planning sessions. They just make the time. I mean, some of them are going to have a very long day today with business plans. So I think this is fair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I see Raj. Go ahead, please.

Dr. Sherman: No, Mr. Chair. I'd like your permission to excuse myself. I have to go to another committee meeting, and my good friend Mr. VanderBurg has kindly stepped in for me. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Anyone else on this discussion?

Mr. Marz: I have a question, and I will be brief. Actually, my question is about brevity. Hon. Hancock, you have brought up the five-minute question and answer. I think that's an extremely popular provision that we put in the standing orders. I don't have the standing orders in front of me, but I believe they say it provides for five minutes for brief questions and answers. The interpretation of that in the past has been to expand to allow people to ask a member to finish his speech for the remainder of the five minutes. Now, I think that interpretation does not represent the intent of that standing order, and I think we need a little bit more clarity around that to allow only for brief questions and comments because to allow someone to use the whole five minutes to finish a speech is not brief, and it does prevent other members from participating.

The Chair: Go ahead, Dave.

Mr. Hancock: If I may just on that point, I would agree with you.

I think the interpretation has been wrong. I think that the standing order clearly contemplated questions and comments that were brief and that they would be shared. In other words, one person wouldn't use the whole five. The interpretation that allows someone to get up and say, "Did you have more to say?" is clearly not in the spirit of it.

Now, whether or not that standing order could be tightened to clarify that or not or whether that's just an interpretation of the chair, I'd be delighted to deal with that. I didn't include it in this motion because there were issues of some people who believed that we should eliminate the five minutes, others who believed that we should extend it to the mover and the speaker after the mover, yet others who thought the status quo was fine if we tightened it up. Almost nobody liked it the way it's being interpreted now.

Mr. Marz: If I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Marz: My suggestion would be, to provide clarity to the chair, specified time limits of 30 seconds or 45 seconds such as question period is.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
I'll go back to Laurie, please.

Ms Blakeman: Well, this particular clause was a compromise – and I'll underline that word – to having the total debate time being reduced. Everyone used to have 20 minutes to speak to government bills and 15 minutes to speak to private members' bills, and those were cut back by five minutes. This was what was offered in its place to allow for a better exchange, and it was, in fact, at the request of the Government House Leader or the government side to allow government members to question, particularly, the opposition members after their speeches. That's why it's there. It quite clearly says, "to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly . . . and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments."

The Speaker, when this was introduced, gave a Speaker's ruling indicating that he would try and anticipate how many people had indicated an interest in speaking during that five minutes and took up that particular role to divide the time as fairly as possible. If one member is using the time, that's indicating that no one else asked to participate because if two people asked to participate, then the time would be split in half between them. So I don't think that time is being abused. I'd rather give that up and go back to having an additional five minutes' speaking time, which is what we lost in that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Any comments?

Mr. Hancock: Question.

The Chair: It's your call for the question. We have the original motion that Laurie has asked to split into four. We'll deal with the first part first, and that is that Dave has moved that

the concepts for standing orders set out in the attached schedule A be approved in principle and referred to Parliamentary Counsel with a request that standing order amendments be drafted to implement same.

Any further questions? Then I'll call the question. All in favour of that motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed?

Mr. Taylor: No.

Ms Blakeman: No, and I'd like it noted, please.

Ms Notley: Same as well for me, please.

The Chair: Okay. It's opposed by Rachel and Laurie.

Mr. Taylor: And by Dave Taylor.

The Chair: And by Dave Taylor. Thank you. That is carried.

Somebody has asked for a five-minute break. It's five minutes to 3 right now. We're good to go till 4 o'clock. If you want to take a five-minute break, we can.

Mrs. Leskiw: Some of us have a CPC meeting starting right now, so it would be nice to finish so we could go to our other meeting.

The Chair: Okay. If you want to finish this, then that's what we'll do. If somebody needs to take a break, go ahead, and the meeting will carry on.

Then we'll move to the second part of this motion. Do you want to speak to that, Dave?

Mr. Hancock: I'll just briefly indicate that normally when you're drafting legislation or standing orders or those sorts of things, rules interrelate. It's appropriate, in my view, to have it clearly understood that while the concepts have been set out, there may be a need to have other standing orders amended to make the whole package work. That's what's intended by the second piece. There may be issues that come up that are in tangent or similar that we would want to draft standing orders for and bring back to the committee. The committee gets final approval, so there's no risk in it. It's just a matter of sort of saying: don't limit yourself to this if there's something that makes sense that needs to be done in accordance with this.

The Chair: Okay. We've heard the explanation for this motion. Any discussion? Then I'll call the question. All in favour of motion 2?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Opposed? Again I see two opposed. Note that Laurie and Rachel are opposed. How about you, Dave?

Mr. Taylor: No. I agree.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. That's carried, then.

We'll move to motion 3. Again, do you want to explain this, Dave?

2:55

Mr. Hancock: Yes. In some of the discussions we had, there was some indication that there might be a need to clarify rules around the policy field committees. I didn't attempt to do that, and there wasn't any presentation that I recall at the past meeting about it, but it might be appropriate, if we're going to bring back a package, just to clarify. One of the rules that was being talked about I've looked up, and it is there, and that is that quorum for the PFC is one-third of its members. So I'm not sure that there needs to be a clarification of

rules, but I thought it would be appropriate to get the approval of this committee to talk to the chairs, presumably to consult with the opposition, and then if there are some suggestions, to bring them back as part of the package.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Any questions? Okay. All in favour of motion 3?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Dave?

Mr. Taylor: No. I'm in agreement, too.

The Chair: Great. That's unanimously carried.
We'll go to number 4. Go ahead, Dave. Maybe you want to talk about this.

Mr. Hancock: No, that's just what happens next, which is that once we've drafted amendments, they would come back to this table, and to put a time frame around it to say, "I think we have to report to the Assembly by October 30." We may want to extend that time or ask the House to extend that time, but clearly the standing orders, once they're drafted, have to come here before they go back to the House.

The Chair: Okay. Any comments on that?
We'll have the vote. All in favour of this motion?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Dave?

Mr. Taylor: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. That's unanimously carried as well.
Then we'll go to the other motion that Dave mentioned at the beginning of the meeting. Maybe we'll just have you read that.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Chair. There's one technicality there. Rather than Parliamentary Counsel, because they're going to be tied up drafting standing orders, I would move that the Leg. Assembly Office be requested to undertake a survey and review of the practices of tabling documents across the parliamentary system and report back to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing in due course on the said practices.

The Chair: Okay. I see a comment here. Rob, go ahead.

Mr. Reynolds: Just a point of clarification here, Mr. Chair, on when

it says "across the parliamentary system." Do you mean Canadian jurisdictions, or you mean a bit more exotic?

Mr. Hancock: I don't think saying "across the parliamentary system" means that you have to be exhaustive and look at every parliament. I think a representative sample of parliaments would be quite satisfactory.

Ms Calahasen: Could Canadian be the context, then?

The Chair: Any question here or comment? Go ahead, please.

Ms Gravel: What we can do is that we can undertake to see what they do in Canadian jurisdictions, and we'll see what they do in the parliaments in New South Wales and the House of Commons, United Kingdom. So we'll do a comparison, and we'll put together a chart with the information – who's allowed to table documents and what type of documents can be tabled – and we'll get that back to the committee.

The Chair: Okay. So who wants to do it? Parliamentary Counsel or LAO?

Mr. Reynolds: That's fine to say the Legislative Assembly Office. We all work together anyway, so that's just fine.

The Chair: Any more questions on this motion? Then we will call the question. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Laurie is opposed. Dave?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. I'm going to oppose it, too, just on principle.

The Chair: Okay. That's great. It's carried.

Then I think that brings us to number 6 on our agenda, Other Business, if there is any other business to bring up today. If not, I think we'll probably have the next meeting at the call of the chair because we're not sure exactly when all this will be done. We'll be back here next week, and I'll poll the members and find a good date to have the next meeting. We'll call it.

Now we're looking for a motion to adjourn. All right. All in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:59 p.m.]

