



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Privileges and Elections,
Standing Orders and Printing

Monday, November 17, 2008
8:07 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
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First Session**

**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)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC)
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat (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 Barry McFarland

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
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Communications Services
Melanie Friesacher	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Philip Massolin	Committee Research Co-ordinator
Stephanie LeBlanc	Legal Research Officer
Diana Staley	Research Officer
Rachel Stein	Research Officer
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Monday, November 17, 2008

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing to order. I just want to thank everyone for coming out at this early hour on Monday morning and putting your heads together to go through this last meeting on the standing orders.

Welcome to members and staff. I just want to start this meeting by introducing ourselves for the record. My name is Ray Prins, MLA, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Hancock: Dave Hancock, MLA, Edmonton-Whitemud.

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

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

Mr. Rogers: George Rogers, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

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

Ms Pastoor: Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Senior Parliamentary Counsel.

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

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

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel.

Mr. Berger: Evan Berger, Livingstone-Macleod.

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Amery: Moe Amery, Calgary-East.

Ms Notley: Rachel Notley, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Mitzel: Len Mitzel, Cypress-Medicine Hat, substituting for Barry McFarland.

Mr. Doerksen: Arno Doerksen, Strathmore-Brooks and all points in between.

Mr. Liepert: Ron Liepert, Calgary-West.

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

The Chair: Thanks, everyone.

What we have before us is the agenda, and unless there are any changes, I'd like a motion to adopt it.

Mr. Rogers: So moved, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. All in favour? That's carried.

We also have minutes in front of us. I'm sure everybody has seen them. If we could maybe have a motion to approve the minutes. Arno. Thank you very much. All in favour? That's carried.

Moving directly into the agenda, we have the final review of the proposed standing order changes, and what I'll do is just turn it directly over to Dave for maybe some comments on the last amendments that we have before us.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At the last meeting it was determined that we should have one more meeting to allow for a final review of the document. There was also the potential for discussion of rules which may come out of the operation of the policy field committees. I can report that I met with the House leader of the Official Opposition with respect to House rules, and we've agreed to meet again, but we've also determined that most of the issues that we wanted to discuss didn't really deal with the standing orders themselves, so I'm not bringing forward any potential changes this morning relative to that.

However, in reviewing the standing orders that we have proposed, there's one error that was made, there's one clarification, and there's one new piece that I would like to propose to the committee. I'm proposing to move that part A be amended as follows: in section 1 in the proposed Standing Order 3(4)(a) by striking out "the first Monday in February" and substituting "the second Tuesday in February." That is as a result of a communication error I had – and it's entirely my fault in translating that one – so that's just to correct the time that was intended in there. It was actually supposed to be the first Tuesday in February, and upon reflection and reviewing it again, we determined that one of the most difficult pieces of getting ready for a session is to make sure that legislation is drafted in a timely way and is ready for the House.

It's been my practice as House leader to try and make sure that we can introduce as much legislation as possible in the first few days of the session so that as we're debating the throne speech, members of the House and particularly the opposition have an opportunity to see the legislation and be ready for it when it comes back for debate. There's always a crunch in coming back after Christmas and making sure that the legislation that's been approved to go forward by government gets through the drafting process, gets back to Leg. Review, and is available for the House. After reviewing them and talking with all the parties again, we determined that we should suggest the second Tuesday in February rather than the first, which would then make that process, rather than a rushed one with the potential for mistakes, one that has just that little bit of extra time to get it right.

We're proposing in section 2 an amendment by adding section 7.1 after section 7, that Standing Order 52(1) is amended by striking out "At the commencement of each session" and substituting "At the commencement of the first session of each Legislature." That refers to the appointment of committees. You may recall that we have put in place a provision that the membership of the policy field committees would be established once at the beginning of a new Legislature and then would stand during the course of that Legislature. Of course, they can be amended by motion at any time.

We hadn't made the same change with respect to the membership of the standing committees of the House. As you recall, on the first day of each session right after the throne speech we introduce the committees. This would make provision that those committees would be appointed at the beginning of the Legislature and would stand for the duration of the Legislature. Of course, again, they can be amended from time to time by motion in the House, and we have done that in the past.

The third one, which is not on the sheet which was circulated, refers to page 8 of part A, and the proposal is in section 12: to amend section 59.01(6), which is on page 8, by striking out “may then proceed to the next department’s estimates that are scheduled for consideration.” The reason for striking that out – it doesn’t change the meaning of that whole section at all, but it’s really a clarification. I’ve had a number of members say to me: does that mean that ministers have to be on standby for a committee meeting and be ready to come in? What I’ve said is: no, it references “scheduled.” In other words, if they’re scheduled to come, then they start when the first one has finished, but because so many people have asked about that, it’s clear that that’s unclear. Taking it out doesn’t remove the ability to do the scheduling in the way that we’ve talked about, but it does remove that question that people have in their minds.

Mr. Chairman, I would propose that part A be amended in those three parts and for those reasons.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Are there any comments or questions or discussion on these three amendments? I see we’re ready to vote. All in favour of these three amendments?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried unanimously. Thank you very much.

If there is no further business related to the amendments to the standing orders, then there’s just one other thing, under Other Business, and that is that because there are probably no more meetings scheduled any time soon, what we need to do is have a process by which we can approve the minutes from this meeting. Otherwise, they can’t go on the website. What I’m asking for is a motion to authorize the chair to review, amend, and approve the minutes for November 17 – that’s today’s meeting – on behalf of this committee. You’ll move that? Okay. Everybody understands what that’s about? Good.

8:15

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Chair, we do get to see the minutes through e-mail. Is that what it is?

The Chair: Yes. That’s correct.

Ms Calahasen: So once we see them, we’re okay, right?

The Chair: Right. Following this motion, they’ll be approved by the chair. If we didn’t do that, you wouldn’t be able to see them till the next meeting, which could be 20 years from now.

Okay. All in favour of that motion?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. That’s carried.

Further to that, there will be no new meetings except at the call of the chair.

I would like to thank at this point in time all the members for their participation in the review of the standing orders. A lot of work has been done. I want to thank the staff from the Legislative Assembly Office and the *Hansard* people as well for their participation and their work.

If I could have a motion to adjourn.

Ms Pastoor: Oh, could I speak first?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms Pastoor: I think I just want to get on the record with a couple of comments. This committee hadn’t met for almost 20 years, and now we’ve met two or three times and probably won’t meet again. I just feel that a lot of the work that we did – and I’m not saying that it’s not good – in committee really was probably the responsibility of the two House leaders. Prior to this, I think both our House leaders and the leader of the third party as a part of that really did a fine job, so I’m still not exactly sure why we had the large meeting when, in fact, it was the responsibility of the House leaders.

The Chair: Well, I guess that in the end it is the responsibility of the entire committee to make these changes. It’s good that the House leaders work on these things, but in the end it is the responsibility of elected members to make these amendments.

Ms Pastoor: Well, I guess my point was that it worked for 20 years. I’m not sure why we did it now.

Mrs. Forsyth: Just a comment to Bridget. I’ve been here since 1993, and this committee has been around, and I always questioned what it did. I felt the whole process very worth while. I liked the idea of the people who put together the new standing orders, et cetera, giving us, even though we didn’t win some of the battles, like I did, the opportunity to debate it and say why we support it. For example, I’ll go back. I thought it would be a good idea to have sessions in the morning. I got overwhelmingly defeated on that particular motion, but for me it was an extremely valuable process to be able to say that I was part of a committee that had the opportunity after 20 years to be able to set new rules in what’s going to be the future, hopefully for – I’m not going to say 20 years because I don’t assume that that’s going to happen. I mean, we all age. People change. Things change.

As much as the 8 o’clock meetings were a little early for us on a Monday coming from out of town, I just want to thank Jody and the legislative staff, that have done the hard work, the chair and Rachel and Laurie because I think they’ve done an extremely good job.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I just want to get on the record that I find those comments rather amusing considering the fact that this is as open and transparent a way to discuss changes to the democratic process – are you suggesting that we do it behind closed doors? I think this is quite telling, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I have one more comment here. Raj.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As a new member it’s a good opportunity for the new members to learn, to see how the process works, and to sit across the table from our other colleagues. This is part of us working together. It’s been an honour for me to be here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. You’ve done a good job.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to welcome Ron Stevens from Calgary.
George.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to be on the record. With due respect to my colleague from Lethbridge-East I think it’s great that we had the House leaders, whether you want to

say that they were behind the scenes or not, the people that did the heavy lifting, so to speak, to slog through some of the negotiations to get these changes made.

I do have to agree with a number of my colleagues. This committee has the responsibility to debate and make decisions on the final draft and then, ultimately, recommend that to the Legislature. It's not a done deal here, Mr. Chairman, as much as we might think it is. We do have to go back, and this is at the will of the entire Legislature. I don't think we should lose sight of that. Certainly, I give thanks to the people that did a lot of the heavy lifting to get this done. Again, the process does work, and I'm pleased to have had a chance to have said something through the process and not have this left to one or two individuals.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

If there are no further comments, I just want to add one more comment myself, and that is that the final report back to the Legislature from this committee will be tabled in the House as soon as it can be put together, probably later this week, and we'll look forward to that.

We do have a motion to adjourn on the floor, so without further comment all in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Then we're adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 8:21 a.m.]

