

10:14 a.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 1992

[Chairman: Mr. Gogo]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I very much appreciate you all gathering this morning. Bob Hawkesworth could not be with us.

MR. FOX: We're waiting for a flight from Calgary, I guess.

MRS. B. LAING: Yeah. The first one just got in from Calgary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that to do with the loan guarantee or the fog?

MRS. B. LAING: The fog.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, we'll move right along and get the meeting started.

Could we get approval of the agenda we're going to deal with today, which you have a copy of?

I understand there's been a problem with Richard Helm. Is it a death in the family?

MS BLANEY: His father.

We're tracking down John Cotter and Graham Thomson now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So we're tracking them down. Well, it's nice to know there's a lineup with the media. We planned that for this morning, and then this afternoon we're going to deal with our shopping list. Now, we have Graham Thomson and John Cotter coming. Oh, here they are. Good morning.

Members of the committee, do you agree with the agenda for today?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Now, if you recall, we discussed at some length last meeting how important it was to deal with the media as a communication tool.

I guess before we have our discussion with the media, we should deal with the minutes of the last meeting. Any errors or omissions?

MRS. HEWES: I'll move the minutes, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think we dispensed with seconds last time. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Well, let me issue a formal welcome to the members of the media who are with us this morning. I don't know who is going to speak for the media. I suspect they're all going to speak.

Now, Graham Thomson, who is not with us for some reason, was coming. Richard Helm is president of the press gallery. As I understand, there's been a death in the family.

Perhaps you could start off by identifying yourselves going clockwise, or anticlockwise from your point of view I guess, and then we'll have a discussion, hopefully a presentation, by the press gallery.

MR. SEREDIUK: Okay. I am Stuart Serediuk. I'm a photojournalist with CFCN television, out of Calgary. You've seen me around working at the Legislature bureau for the station.

MR. SCHUETTNER: I'm Darren Schuettner, with the *Financial Post*.

MR. GRAY: I'm David Gray, a reporter with CFCN television.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And the perennial chap.

MR. GRAVELAND: Bill Graveland from Standard Broadcast News, and I'm secretary-treasurer of the press gallery.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The general areas of interest may be the following. I'd like to turn it over to the media and have them make various comments, whether it's a formal presentation or not, and then have members of the committee put various questions. I was going to list the topics of interest, Bill and others, in the categories of, say, number one, physical access to members of the House. You might just want to make a list of this. Sometimes they call them scrums. Another one would be: to your knowledge, how do other provinces handle the media needs? Maybe there is a good example you could quote. Your colleagues in the media from other jurisdictions and their perceptions of our legislative process. Are we open? Are we secretive? Are we accountable? Perhaps fourth, any suggestions you would have for improvements. You might have a view on the whole question of question period, which is amongst the longest in Canada - it's 45 minutes - i.e., that format.

Mr. Fox from Vegreville is the deputy Opposition House Leader, and Mrs. Hewes is the House leader for the Liberals. They have a good knowledge of the format of the question period; for example, who can ask what and so on. The Committee of Supply, which lasts 25 days, is amongst the longest in Canada. Some are longer because they have no time limit. The whole question of television in the House is something that this committee feels strongly about: the coverage of private members' day; i.e., Tuesday and Thursday.

I just throw those out as areas that you may want to comment on. We've got about an hour and 45 minutes, and we'll be meeting again this afternoon on other topics. If that's a reasonable amount of fodder to feast on, perhaps I could turn it over, Bill, to you and others. [interjection] Oh, sorry. It may be that other members of the committee want to make a comment before it goes to the media.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to add, if I could, one other general request. I think many members of the media are students of politics. You probably have times when you discuss the overall direction of government in Canada and its perception by the public. If you have any general comments about ways in which the government could operate better in terms of providing information in a more clear and succinct manner to the public and also if there are general comments that you have about the conduct of politicians in terms of getting their message out to the public, I would certainly, as one member of this committee, invite your comments. I'm sure that you look at some broad issues and philosophize sometimes about how governments are relating through the media to the public, and if you have any recommendations, suggestions there, we'd sure like to hear them, at least I would.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments?

MRS. HEWES: Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, press conferences as well, the physical arrangements there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a final comment I'll make is that as you know, members are elected from 83 ridings to come here to represent constituents. Alberta may be unique – I don't know – but certainly there are different interests for different members based on where they come from. Our Standing Orders make provision for private members' day, when members supposedly can express those views. It seems to me that the absence of any press gallery on those days means that communication doesn't get out. Maybe there is a better way of handling that. It appears that most of the concentration is on the government, on question period and those types of things. Yet as you know, although we may have a large cabinet, there's a lot more people representing voters than members of cabinet. Let me end there, gentlemen, and turn it over to you to hear your observations, comments, or questions.

10:24

Mr. GRAVELAND: Okay. First of all, to start at the bottom and go back up, on private members' Bills I think a lot of the reason why you don't see a lot of coverage on private members' days is because, and it may not sound very nice, the chances are not that great that the Bill is going to be passed. Normally, if there's anything that tweaks the interest of some of the media, they get it when the Bill is given first reading. Quite often you will see, if it's perceived to be a good enough story, that it will get play when it gets first reading. Most of us who've been here for quite a while know that, one, unless you're a member of government – even then your chances of getting a private members' Bill through are fairly unlikely, so the importance of the Bill diminishes, especially when there is other different legislation being introduced by government.

Physical access. You guys have probably all heard this. This room looks very familiar to some of us who've been around for quite a while. I think a lot of hard feelings have erupted over the last four or five years the minute this was made into a lounge. I've heard the arguments why it was made into a lounge, but there were a lot less problems regarding confrontations with security, with the hallways being blocked when the Speaker came in, that sort of thing, when this room was available, because normally you'd put your note in at the door and you'd pull whoever you wanted over into a corner here. Now the joke from the media is the line of death out there. You're not allowed to step over a certain line in the hallway, and it's ridiculous. You know, you get the Sergeant-at-Arms prodding you in the ribs or pushing you, even when it's a cabinet minister that may be standing there in the hall with you, and telling you you're going to have to clear the way. Mr. Gogo had expressed concerns before about a confrontational style. Well, as far as I'm concerned, that's the start of when it really became confrontational down here. I've been here seven-plus years, and when I came down here, it was a fairly easygoing place. It's kind of like battle lines have been drawn when you're talking about just silly little things like the hallway and whether you stand on the top stair or the second stair.

Anyone else, any comments? You guys probably have a lot of examples of that.

MR. GRAY: Yeah. In terms of television coverage you could go on and on and on about the absurd examples, and I think everyone is familiar with the most absurd.

There is sort of a fortress mentality. I've been here just over a year, and you really know it. There's a real perception that there are the people up there in the offices and the route to get at them

is tortuous at best. During question period the hallways are set up like marble buffalo jumps: you're just herded into a corner. There are security guards at the end who are told to have their arms up and ready to push you back, so you find yourself getting shoved from behind, shoved from the front. Then you get politicians asking: well, why can't you ask those deep, meaningful questions? Well, it's not a time when you can do that. It's a ridiculous situation, and it has to be changed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we hear the other comments first, and then we'll have the committee members.

MR. SCHUETTLER: Well, you're asking about the situation in other provinces?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just identify yourself first.

MR. SCHUETTLER: I'm Darren Schuettler of the *Financial Post*.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We want to get your name in the *Hansard*.

MR. SCHUETTLER: Okay. I worked in Ottawa for a year and worked in Saskatchewan. This is the most restrictive atmosphere for reporters in comparison to those two situations. In Ottawa there are no lines on the floors. The reporters and cameramen are allowed to move freely and speak with, you know, ministers and things like that. In Saskatchewan Grant Devine's government gave fairly free access to reporters. You could go into a minister's office and wait to ask him questions later. Premier Bill Blakeney held regular weekly news conferences. So this is the most restrictive atmosphere that I've worked in. For example, the Premier's office: it's difficult to get an itinerary of where Mr. Getty would be on certain days. I find that most difficult, just trying to plan what you're going to do during the day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks.
Stuart?

MR. SEREDIUK: Thanks. Stuart Serediuk, CFCN. I've been here three and a half years now. When I first started working here, the confrontation mentality, fortress mentality, hadn't been set up yet. Once the Confederation Room was closed down and the rules imposed, that's when that confrontational mentality really started to kick into place. Being the guy that takes the pictures that go on the air, with having the lines of death drawn up and the security guards holding everybody back, it looks really good on TV. You know, people at home watching this are going: "Well, that's quite a place they got there. That's quite a government." It really conveys a very negative impression of everybody in this building, the politicians and the security personnel, when you have that sort of image coming across on a television screen. If that's what you want, great, but I don't know of any politicians who want that kind of image broadcast to their constituents. So that's a point to maybe think about in your recommendations.

MR. GRAVELAND: One other point, too, with the closing down of this room. In the old days if you wanted to talk to a politician, you'd know whether the politician had left because you could sort of keep an eye on things, but there are escape routes galore now when people are leaving. And it happens, you know. If someone's in hot water over something and they want to avoid you, well, they go down the back alley. It only took Ralph Klein about a week to discover that route out. Plus the people who are upstairs in the media area, up in the actual gallery, when they see

the minister or politician leaving, they can no longer come down here. They have to go all the way down to the library. They're not allowed to cut through the House because that would be disruptive. So they have to come all the way down to the library and then come back up the stairs. If you want to get to someone you want to talk to, the chances are that you're not going to get them. So if a politician doesn't want to talk to you, he doesn't.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before we hear from Brian and Derek, I wanted to ask you – I mean, there are deadlines; there are time lines; there are those kinds of things that you people are charged with by your employers. There's 6 o'clock news; there's 5:30 news; there's all that kind of stuff. Could you just share with us the type of time constraints that you're under? I mean, you're dispatched to the Assembly to deal with whatever happens at the Assembly, but there are some realities in here in terms of time lines and so on. Could you just share that with us, as to what they might be? Do you have to have whatever you're going to have for the news, for example, at 4:30 or 5? Would you just share that with me?

MR. GRAVELAND: That's interesting, because everybody else is going to have a different story here for you. For radio audiences what you want to do – your primary purpose is to hit a 12 o'clock newscast and a 5 o'clock newscast, because those are where the peak audiences are. TV would be later. The *Financial Post* would be 2:30 in the afternoon.

MR. SCHUETTLER: I write for an eastern paper, so 2:30 is my afternoon deadline.

MR. GRAVELAND: What would be greatly helpful after question period, which is basically the focus of the day other than the committees and everything that you guys meet at, the workings of government – people are on House duty so that they're tied up till 5, or perhaps something else happens. Question period usually ends at roughly 3:30. If there was like a 10-minute break for members when they could go stretch their legs and do these things, then you wouldn't see reporters waiting around till 5 o'clock waiting to talk to certain people. If you're pressed for a deadline, there's another one of your confrontational things. The guy stands outside leaning on the marble slab there for two hours after question period ends, and he may or may not get his interview. If they had a 10-minute break at, say, 3:30 and just let everyone sort of go out and freshen up or whatever, I think it would probably help a lot and probably give you guys a little welcome . . .

MR. GRAY: Even 3:30 is getting a little late. For TV it gets really tough, really tough, fighting the time lines coming out of here. Yesterday's a perfect example. At 4 o'clock the Electoral Boundaries Committee report comes out. For television that means you get a reporter with maybe a live feed and a map trying to translate what happened. We can't do our job best that way. We need to hear from people earlier. When we send in those little cards asking somebody to come out, if they come out it means the story is going to be presented a lot better. The reporter has time to understand what the politician's said, what the issue is, and we can put it together for the news better that night. It makes a tremendous difference. What we have to deal with is that we have to drive halfway across town, set up a feed for a satellite by 5:30 or 20 to 6, and somewhere in that time we have to edit the story as well, so I have to write on a laptop between here and there in

a moving vehicle half the time. That's the kind of thing we put up with.

10:34

MR. GRAVELAND: Now, something you guys have done occasionally when there's a major piece of legislation being introduced – we've managed to talk some of the ministers into having a news conference. I know the opposition sometimes does that when they're introducing a Bill in the afternoon. You know, if you have an announcement embargoed till 2:30, it's great, because you can have the TV room booked, which of course is not available during the session because of the translation service being offered. If you had something at 11 o'clock in the morning, it would give people time to get their reactions done, getting the full story out, and then it would be a formality just waiting for the legislation to be introduced. People don't break embargoes. They realize if they do it once, it's not going to be offered again, so people are – it's like on budget day, no one jumps. Budget day is a prime example: we get the document early in the morning, we have the Treasurer speaking to us at 1 o'clock, and all you do is wait until it's read in the evening.

MR. SCHUETTLER: In Saskatchewan I covered the budget last year. Reporters got it the night before. You got a copy of the budget, everybody signed an embargo, and the embargo held up. Reporters got a better understanding of what the document said, and there was an early morning press conference. It went well; there were no problems.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mutual respect there.

MR. SCHUETTLER: Yes.

MR. SEREDIUK: I've nothing to add.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Brian?

MR. EVANS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the physical constraints that you folks have to deal with. Certainly when this building was built in 1904, 1905, it was very adequate to deal with any kind of reporting, but with the narrow stairwells, with the narrow hallways, and even with this room, I see a real problem. I came in here in '89, and when there were a couple or three scrums in the Confederation Room, it was a very, very hectic place. There's no question about it. I know that wouldn't be a perfect solution to you. A perfect solution I guess would be building a new Legislature where we had an opportunity to deal with these concerns, but I'm more concerned about the other jurisdictions. For example, in Saskatchewan, where Darren spent some time, have they had the same problems with configuration, and how have they resolved it?

The next question after that is: if we've got a solution here, and you want to suggest a solution, is it just freeing up the Confederation Room again, and if so, how do we deal with the very cramped quarters which occur in here as well when we've got camera equipment? Stuart, when you've got four or five cameras in here it's just as tough on you, I would presume, almost as much as when you're in the hallways.

MR. SEREDIUK: This is a football field compared to the hallways.

MR. EVANS: I suppose so, yes.

MR. GRAVELAND: Plus tables used to be moved, so you had a wide room. You know, there was usually a table down there for

anyone who wanted an impromptu news conference. The other tables were moved against the wall. Towards the end, before they closed this down, Oscar started telling us that we couldn't be in a direct line from the doorway as well, but before, you could just — you know, en masse, and there were never any complaints.

MR. EVANS: Well, what about the other jurisdictions?

MR. SCHUETTLER: Well, the rotunda on Parliament Hill is 10 times the size of this little hallway here, so there's plenty of space. I mean, you could have 10 or 15 interviews going on. There's plenty of room there for the media and politicians to function, but in this small hallway right here, you get a couple of television cameras going and you'll start getting bodies thrown around and it becomes difficult. It becomes annoying; there's tension.

MR. EVANS: I guess my question, though, is: are you aware of other jurisdictions where there are the physical constraints, and if so, what have other jurisdictions done to try to overcome those difficulties?

MR. GRAVELAND: The situation in Saskatchewan?

MR. SCHUETTLER: Well, in Saskatchewan most of the media speak with politicians in what they call their radio room. So I think there's much more access to politicians through news conferences, at least from the experience that I had, although there are scrums. I don't think you can get away from having scrums under this kind of system.

MR. EVANS: Mr. Chairman, just to follow up on that. Is that a voluntary situation, then, in Saskatchewan that there's a compromise between the politicians and . . .

MR. SCHUETTLER: I think in Saskatchewan they had a better understanding of what the media needed, you know, and I think they accommodated them.

MR. EVANS: It's really a trust situation there, isn't it? Because if they're not directly adjacent to the House, then you've got to make sure that when the people who are in the House are asked to come to a certain area, they do come. Are you saying that that's not happening here?

MR. GRAY: What I think we're trying to say — at least I feel, anyway — is that you seem concerned about the space and the physical confines of the building. That is restrictive certainly, but it's more a problem of attitude and of trust than of space. We can deal with that. We can move things down around the fountain if you want to talk to people there. It's not so much where we talk to politicians as how it takes place.

MR. GRAVELAND: I don't know how many times we've chased after Dick Johnston striding helter-skelter down the hallway going out the other entrance there. You see camera guys and people running, and that's a hazard because, you know, you're chasing someone down the stairs. I don't know what it would be like falling with a camera. Stu has more experience in that. You know, you get hit with the camera and stuff like that, and it's awful.

Like I say, before there was not a problem. Even if a cabinet minister had a piece of legislation, he'd set up in there and everyone would put their microphones in there and it worked wonderfully. Like I say, it was fine here for years. There was

never a problem, never a complaint until this was shut off, and then it was like a slap in the face to the media. Suddenly they're making it hard, and then they started to barricade this. There was the time they had it roped off way back like they were trying to teach us a lesson. Well, if you take that kind of attitude, the media will always get the last word. Always.

MR. FOX: I really appreciate you coming and sharing your concerns with us because I think that although we have somewhat different responsibilities, we all serve the public, and to the extent we understand each other's concerns and work together, we do a better job of living up to that mandate. It seems to me that the issues of whether this room is open or not or where the lines are are sort of details that need to be resolved, and what we have to set up is a process that can address concerns like that.

One thing I suggested during the last session of the Legislature during question period was whether or not the government would be interested — Mr. Johnston, answering on behalf of the government, indicated that he would consider it, and I'm wondering how you'd react to it — if we set up a joint committee with representatives of the parliamentary press gallery and an MLA from each party, sort of thing, to address issues of concern and try and make sure that we always understand one another's concerns and the constraints on our abilities to get our jobs done so that we can resolve these things without them festering and developing into major issues over time.

I can think of a couple of things from the media's point of view. One: access to members and your ability to conduct interviews. There was a concern a couple of years ago about some problems with comments unrelated to political issues being made by MLAs to female members of the press gallery, some inappropriate behaviour that needed to be addressed. From the point of view of MLAs maybe someone would say: "You know, gee, I like to be available, but I'm concerned. Someone came and knocked on my door, and I didn't have my teeth in or my wig on or whatever, and I felt that was an invasion of my personal privacy. I'm happy to be a public figure and be accountable, but that bothered me." So there may be issues on both sides that could be brought to some sort of panel or committee that had the ability to address concerns in a nonconfrontational way and try and resolve them. I'm wondering how you feel about that.

MR. GRAY: If you solved the problems of access, you wouldn't have reporters showing up on your front doorstep period . . .

MR. FOX: Right.

MR. GRAY: . . . whichever side that comes from. There was a concern at the end of the table earlier as to how politicians can get their central message — "this is what I'm working on" — back to their constituents. It's one thing that I guess the opposition is a little better at in terms of they let us know what they're working on all the time: "This is what's going on; this is what we're planning; this is when that press conference is going to be. We'll talk to you on Tuesday about that." Yet I don't know how many times I've heard from MLAs in government just saying: "This is what I'm working on. This is what I want my constituents to know about." It's a feeling like, "Well, I know I'm doing my job, but no one in the media knows what I'm up to." That doesn't mean that we don't think you're doing a good job. It means that we don't know what you're doing, and there's no way for us to find that out unless we hear from you.

MR. FOX: Again, I'm wondering how you react to my suggestion. If we didn't have this meeting here today, the specific

concerns you have about access would not be addressed, and it would just continue to fester. I'm wondering if you would be interested if government would respond to a joint committee that has the mandate to address items of concern coming from the gallery and from elected members so that we don't get into situations where there's an impasse and relationships deteriorate.

10:44

MR. GRAVELAND: My question would be what kind of power the committee would have, because anytime there have been any complaints with the gallery before, we get a summons – and that's basically what it is – from the Speaker ordering us to appear. Then he will usually read the rights to whoever goes into the meeting, and nothing changes. He'll say: send us a letter if you have complaints. I don't know how many letters went about this room, and he just ignored it. I have nothing against Dr. Carter, but since he has taken over as Speaker, he's exercised his full power, which he has as Speaker because it's all there under the legislation, whereas before there was a little more of an easy, sort of give-and-take type of atmosphere, and there was no confrontation. I don't know if a committee made up of you and us would be able to do anything other than ask the Speaker to do something.

MR. FOX: Well, I guess in my mind there would have to be a definition of responsibilities, and that committee would have as its responsibility defining relationships between media and elected members and would deal with things like access. I mean, you can't force someone to stand still and be interviewed if they don't want to be interviewed – we all recognize that's beyond reason – but rather than you having to deal with the Speaker, who may choose not to deal with your concerns, an all-party committee where there's representation from each party sitting with the gallery to make these rules. I don't view it as an advisory sort of thing. I view it as something that would have . . .

MR. GRAVELAND: But that would require a change that would give you guys the power.

MR. FOX: Right. I guess what we're doing here is trying to brainstorm changes. We're trying to propose changes.

MR. GRAVELAND: Well, I'm sure the gallery would be interested if we could see if it would actually do some good. For the most part I know some members of the executive don't even bother taking complaints anymore. If they have a complaint, they don't even bother. There have been suggestions that maybe we should just go to each individual MLA with a letter saying: "Here's our problem. Can you put some pressure on on our behalf?"

MR. FOX: So it's obvious that the existing system doesn't work and we need to change it.

MR. GRAVELAND: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Bill, we can't do anything to change what happens with individual members of the House – if they don't want to talk to the media, they're going to find a way to get around it – but the physical arrangements I think can and should be influenced. I don't think we need to go back over the history of what occurred here, and I do appreciate

your candour in speaking to it, but do you have a plan? If I said to you, "What's the optimum here to make the thing workable, considering the constraints that we have in the building itself," do you have something apart from the individual letter saying we don't like this, we don't like that? What is it that in your minds would work? Do you have something written down I can look at and give consideration to?

MR. GRAVELAND: I don't have anything written down because we weren't scheduled to appear here this morning, but one: reopening this room would do wonders. I don't know if we're talking about things that can't be changed; maybe this can't be changed. Two: having the TV room available immediately after question period ended would be wonderful, but it never happens, because the people who have set up there for the interpretation service are usually in there till 4, 4:30. So that takes away one avenue that we had before, that we have during the session. For instance, the electoral boundaries report was released to us in the TV room yesterday, and it was wonderful because everybody was there. You're close to your offices, and it's great. If the TV room were available all the time and you trusted the people you wanted to come down, people would wait probably down in the TV room, but nine times out of 10 likely the person you asked to come down to the TV room wouldn't. You sometimes get your best material from a guy walking down the hall who's trying to avoid you. Unless they have something they really want to talk about, they're not going to go out of their way to come down three flights of stairs to talk to you in the TV room. So that's why this room was good, because you had access to them, they were next door. Because we used to be able to stand in the hall, you could almost peek in to make sure the person you wanted was there.

MRS. HEWES: So those two things . . .

MR. GRAVELAND: I think it would do wonders. Now, I don't know; I've heard some talk before about when they started broadcasting question period live. Originally you didn't get the interpretation thing up on the screen. I know a lot of the TV stations would rely on that tape and use it if they missed something during question period. I don't know.

MR. GRAY: It's true. It seems to be a particular concern of the Speaker how many cameras are in the House at any given time. There are only three camera positions, and yet sometimes there are four or five different television stations who need access to that room. Then, of course, there's the problem with the cameramen taking down the gear and running out here in order to get somebody as they're heading off. If they set up a clean feed – is it Access that delivers that?

MR. SEREDIUK: Videotron.

MR. GRAY: Videotron. If they set up a clean feed, it would do wonders just to make it easier for television. Effectively we probably would not need the cameras in the House anywhere near as often as we already have them there. It would get rid of a lot of problems. It's as simple as putting in a new patch line.

MR. SEREDIUK: One of the main reasons we have to have cameras in the House is because our station spends thousands of dollars a year to have our own interpretation, deaf thing, without a person in the corner. By having a person in the corner like Videotron does, the picture – well, it's distracting and unacceptable. So we just choose not to use it. It's far easier for me to set

up a camera, get my own shot, which is going to be clear and unobstructed. Like Dave mentioned: a clean feed without that.

MRS. HEWES: Does that happen in other Houses, Stuart?

MR. SCHUETTLER: In Ottawa there's a clean feed. I'm not sure about Saskatchewan, but in Ottawa you get a clean feed.

MR. SEREDIUK: I talked to the Videotron people last session. They said that's possible. They just to have buy a small piece of equipment for a couple of thousand dollars, and they can do it. The way the contract is set up, they haven't got the ability right now.

MRS. HEWES: Bill, tell me. You've given me three things that you say would change the physical arrangements. Understanding that we can't change that attitude overnight – well, maybe we can; however, that's beside the point – do you think that you reflect the gallery? Can I assume that?

MR. GRAVELAND: I'd say so, because we've talked about this time and time again, and the major complaint . . .

MR. GRAY: There's print, radio, and television here.

MR. GRAVELAND: The major complaint has been the lack of access, being shoved around by security people who have their orders from higher up. The person you want to talk to – say the Premier stops right on the line of death, and someone's over on the other side. They rush over because you don't get many chances to talk to the Premier, and you've got security people saying: "No. Hey, sorry; I know the Premier's right on the line, but you've got to get inside that line somehow." So you see everybody pushing, and, you know, it gets ugly. It's been bad enough over the years having the security guys walking with the Premier along the hallway pushing the camera guys and stuff. I don't know how many times I've seen these camera guys come close to getting smashed right into those marble things going around the corner to the Premier's office. You know, a simple stop for five minutes usually will do it.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, one more question. If we can just leave the whole business of the House aside for one minute, what about your access to members in this building or other buildings? Are there some thoughts there that would improve your capacity? Do you find the same inability to get at members because of security? Is it rigid to the point where you're deprived of access?

10:54

MR. GRAVELAND: Do you mean in the other buildings?

MRS. HEWES: In this building, getting to, say, the Premier's or a minister's office, or over in the annex.

MR. GRAVELAND: Not too much of a problem other than the times when you're wanting to wait for some cabinet ministers. Some of them we don't have a problem, but other ones: they must be talking some really hush-hush, top secret stuff inside just the regular office there, because you get thrown out on your ear and told to wait out in the hall. I don't know what the secretaries are talking back and forth in some of these offices, but you've got to wonder sometimes. That's probably the only problem I've had.

MR. GRAY: Well, let's not forget Government House.

MRS. HEWES: Sorry?

MR. GRAVELAND: He's talking about Government House. That's a good point.

MRS. HEWES: What is that?

MR. GRAY: When reporters are covering things going on in Government House and it's minus 36 outside, we look through the frosty windows and see you inside drinking coffee. We'll spend an hour outside waiting. Something has to change there. It's just a ludicrous situation.

MR. GRAVELAND: That seems to have changed over the years too, though, because back in 1986-87 normally you were just put in that little library off to the side if there was a request to talk to a number of ministers or politicians over the noon hour. They would move you in there, but you weren't privy to any of the information. Now it's like you're not even allowed to put your foot inside the door. I don't know if that was a caucus decision or just the decision of the people of Government House or not. It's an access problem, because sometimes you can't find out when people are leaving. Occasionally you can get someone like Hugh Dunne to come out, and he'll give you a general idea of between what hours they're going to be breaking. It's almost impossible to get ahold of anyone inside Government House during a caucus day. You can request, but the requests never get through.

MR. GRAY: Stuart, wasn't there a problem on the third floor as well?

MR. SEREDIUK: Yeah, there was.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The word "attitude" has been mentioned several times. You know, I've been around here in some people's view too long, but my memory's pretty good. I can even remember when charity was a virtue and not an industry. I mean, I go back that far. My years here tell me that we never had a problem for the longest time. We had good relationships between members of the media, many of whom pursued a career in investigative reporting, in my view. There was always that spirit of, I sensed, co-operation, which utilized this room. Frankly, I can't ever recall there being a problem. I remember a bill for \$200 for scotch tape or something, but I'm sure you're familiar with that.

The message continues to come here: attitude, attitude, attitude; fortress mentality. Those kinds of words are being used. It would seem to me that a politician almost by definition is in the business of communication, and if they're not utilizing the communication services, they're missing a major component. I'm just making these observations. If there are rules and regulations that impede that being done, then surely it's incumbent upon the politicians – in the plural – to resolve that. Quite frankly, I think Derek is the one who said that we're all in the same business, and if we can't communicate with the public, which means our constituents, what the hell do we do?

Bonnie, do you have a question?

MRS. B. LAING: I was just going to say something to David. You say, for instance, that you don't know what we're working on. I think one of the things that I as a first-term MLA find lacking is that I don't even know the names of all the media, I don't know what particular areas you work in, that type of thing. I think if we had that kind of information, you might feel a little bit more comfortable phoning someone and saying we're doing

Bill whatever, and I'll be sponsoring it. I think that kind of information would help a bit with perhaps easing the tension, just sort of more of a co-operative spirit.

MR. GRAY: When I started in this building, I spent the first week going around shaking hands, meeting who's who, and introducing myself around. I was amazed that after that point none of the Calgary MLAs thought to call CFCN. You know the situation in Calgary as well as I do: there isn't a lot of news competition in terms of television.

MRS. B. LAING: Yes.

MR. GRAY: I didn't hear from any of the Calgary MLAs. I couldn't believe it. I thought they would want to talk to me, to figure out what they want. Not a word. Not a sound.

MR. GRAVELAND: Plus there's been a very high turnover here over the last six, seven years, and people coming in perhaps don't know to get in touch with different MLAs. With my company the name's changed three times in the last seven years. It's basically the same thing. Normally if I phone an MLA that I want to talk to, I just tell them it's such and such from the radio station in their community so they can put two and two together type of thing. We probably could circulate a list of the different gallery members and who they represent. It wouldn't be a major problem.

MRS. B. LAING: I think it would be helpful myself. I really do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Elliott, the Member for Grande Prairie, is not with us today, but as you know, there's a standing committee of the House struck at the beginning of each Legislature dealing with members' services, and they deal with a wide range of items. I don't know whether you people have read the minutes of the last meeting. Louise, perhaps you could share with us with regard to the television cameras in terms of single feeds and so on. Do you want to share that with the committee? Because you're in charge of the committee.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. The question of the clean feed was raised at the last Members' Services Committee meeting. My understanding is that they will be providing a clean feed, so that should help you with one of your concerns.

MR. GRAVELAND: That's really good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Derek, do you have another question?

MR. FOX: Well, another thing that we can work on. You described the problems that you have with deadlines, and it caused me to think about the needs that you have and we have to maybe rearrange the agenda here a little bit in terms of timing. Sometimes that's difficult to do from our point of view as elected members because session starts at 2:30 in the afternoon, goes to 5:30. Usually we meet in the evenings from 8 till 10:30 or sometimes beyond. So the days get very long, but the public perception is that we work for about two or three hours a day, you know. I mean, wouldn't I like to have a job where you don't have to show up till 2:30 and you go home at 5:30 and call it a day, when we all realize that everyone's here early in the morning preparing for session and late at night and there's lot of hours involved.

I wonder what your reaction would be to a proposal that would try and compress the same number of sitting hours into four days

instead of five, where we began the afternoon sitting at 1:30 instead of 2:30, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, till 5:30? So question period would be that much earlier in the day, give you time perhaps to file the relevant stories before your deadlines, which I think are becoming more compressed. Isn't CBC now starting news at 5:30?

MR. GRAY: Yes.

MR. FOX: If you've got a major sporting event or something on CFCN, then your news is earlier than usual too. So that may help. Then we have our evening sessions. Then Friday would not be a day off, but it wouldn't be a day where MLAs come and sit in the Legislature collectively. It may be a time for committee meetings to be regularly scheduled or I think more importantly a chance for MLAs who will be representing – if the boundaries ever change – constituencies that are substantially larger to have that extra time in their constituency. I'm wondering how you'd react to a proposal like that.

MR. GRAVELAND: I think 1:30 in the afternoon would be wonderful.

MR. GRAY: That's an excellent idea.

MR. SCHUETTLER: That would be fantastic.

MR. SEREDIUK: That'd be great.

MR. GRAVELAND: Although I know that you'd change caucus times, and all the other meetings would probably have to be adjusted as well.

You know, the best day of the week has got to be Fridays when there's a 10 o'clock in the morning.

MR. FOX: Yeah. Then you've got lots of time.

MR. GRAVELAND: Lots of time, and it works out really well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before we hear from Kurt, I'm sure you can appreciate that the sitting hours of this House, like 2:30 in the afternoon, go back to when the place was built, 1911. You could come in from Leduc with your horse and buggy. The hitching posts are still out there. In fairness, I guess at that time it was very convenient. I think we're the only jurisdiction in the country that does sit in the evening, although it's not mandatory. All these things are going to be unfolding as time goes on, but I think it's particularly important for us to know, and we'll come to this in a minute, on specific items what suggestions you might have – we've already discussed one of them – to make our job easier. When I say "our," I'm talking all of us.

Kurt.

11:04

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple of questions I have. You've outlined some suggestions for improvement, and I'm more interested in that aspect of it. One of the questions I have first of all, before we get into that, is you mentioned something about access to ministers' offices being restricted. That concerns me a little bit. Can you elaborate a little bit more? Like you mentioned that if they toss you out, you have to wait in the hallway type of situation.

MR. GRAVELAND: Well, in most offices – and Mr. Gogo's is a good example – if you wanted to talk to the minister of

something or if he's due in or if you're waiting for an opportunity to talk to him, they have chairs inside the office, and they just say, "If you'd like to wait, just have a seat." It's just kind of a standard politeness. If someone doesn't want you in his office, that's fine. It's not like you're waiting inside the minister's office. You're waiting in a foyer, a public place.

MR. GESELL: No, I appreciate that.

MR. GRAVELAND: There are probably two offices in particular where if you're in the office for 30 seconds, the minister's EA is out there telling you that you're to wait in the hallway. So you kind of go, "Okay; treated like dirt again." Media and politicians: they get treated about the same by the public.

MR. SCHUETTLER: I mean, nobody likes to sit outside an office for four or five hours . . .

MR. GRAVELAND: You're sitting out on the cement, you know.

MR. SCHUETTLER: . . . waiting for a minister to come out. For some ministers you can't even get a time when they may come out for five or 10 minutes and just give a few comments to the media, and if they don't want to say anything and give a no comment, fine. You know, sometimes you're waiting out there four or five hours.

MR. GRAY: It's worse at times. Sometimes you won't even be told whether or not the minister is in the office.

MR. GRAVELAND: Or lied to, as has happened before too.

MR. GRAY: I know we're not supposed to go into examples, but just two weeks ago Mr. Fowler took a trip to Ukraine. The day he left I phoned his office saying, "Is Mr. Fowler around?" I didn't know he was going to Ukraine. His desk wouldn't tell me where he was. "He might get back to you later in the day." What, from a plane on the way to Ukraine? I had to find that out from an EA to another minister. That's ridiculous.

MR. GRAVELAND: I've had times, too, when I've gone into an office and asked if the minister is in and had the staff members go, "No," and at that moment the minister walks out of the office . . .

MR. GRAY: Yeah, we've all had that.

MR. GRAVELAND: . . . into the foyer. They just kind of go: "Well, that's our job. The media's out to get us, so we better protect our bosses." You know, the harder a minister is to get on a subject, if it's controversial or whatever, proportionately the longer you wait. When you get your opportunity to get him, you're going to go after him.

MR. GRAY: It's not so much go after them.

MR. GRAVELAND: Well, you know, you've got to take a harder line.

MR. GRAY: Yeah. There's a much more likely chance that there's going to be a TV camera on their front doorstep when they go home that evening, that's all. We have a job to do, and our job is to talk to that person.

MRS. HEWES: The interview is going to be confrontational.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before Kurt with his follow-up question, for what it's worth, I happen to be a minister. I've made it a policy that every call received is answered the same day. It's not without effort. I mean, it's not easy, but if you don't do it, it snows up to the point where you know you can't do it.

I've got to confess, Kurt and others, that as chairman of the Council of Ministers of Education, I've had to do a lot of traveling. To rush from A to B to get on the airplane and to be able to push that card in the seat ahead of you and get on the telephone and answer those calls has been like a miracle for me. Now, I can't speak for the media, but I'm sure they appreciate that kind of response.

Kurt? Sorry.

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to carry on. You talked about access when you talked about the Confederation Room here, but you also mentioned physical access to the press gallery. I would assume that if this question of this room is resolved, that would also resolve then that access problem. It's somewhat circuitous right now, is it, because of the restrictions that exist on this level?

MR. GRAVELAND: You mean upstairs?

MR. GESELL: Yeah, the press gallery up there.

MR. GRAVELAND: In the House.

MR. GESELL: Yes.

MR. GRAVELAND: Yeah. You may have noticed over the last couple of years there's been a marked lessening of the number of gallery members who go up there. In the old days everybody went upstairs and it was packed, you could barely find anywhere to sit. Granted, we now have the television downstairs, but you can get from downstairs up to the third floor to catch a politician faster than you can leaving upstairs and going down through the library and then back up the stairs.

MR. GESELL: My question really was: if we resolve some of the situation here . . .

MR. GRAVELAND: If you resolved that, it would take care of 90 percent of the problem.

MR. GESELL: That would solve some of the other problems with access as well.

MR. GRAVELAND: Yeah.

Well, we realize that your government is not going to always want to talk on certain issues, or opposition for that matter. There are a number of issues that come to mind, but the harder you make the job to do, that's where the confrontation comes from. There are hard feelings, and then it just kind of festers. It continues on and on and on, and every time one little thing happens that isn't pleasant, it gets blown up because you remember the other things that have happened.

MR. GESELL: I don't want to reference the other suggestions that have been made. I've made a note of them.

Just to follow up on what Derek was saying with respect to the hours that we are sitting, you mentioned, if I recall correctly, that

Friday is about the best day because we start in the morning, and it allows, I assume, for all of you – radio, print, and television – sufficient time to get the story in and do all the things that you would have to do. You also suggested that there should perhaps be a break between question period and the remainder of the debate. I'm looking for some suggestions. What comes to mind obviously to me is that noon hour might be a reasonable break for that type of situation. So if you have a session in the morning, have question period in that session, then have a break at noon hour and then carry on in the afternoon with debate as we partly do on Fridays. Might that be a reasonable way to proceed?

MR. GRAVELAND: Ideally I would love to see a 10 o'clock in the morning question period every day of the week because every story, every big Bill that was introduced you'd have enough time to get hold of everybody you needed to. You'd get balanced – you wouldn't have to be sometimes relying on just one angle. You get something delivered to you at 2, 3 o'clock in the afternoon and by the time you get doing follows or trying to get reaction, people have gone home.

MR. GESELL: Then a final one, Mr. Chairman. I think you've addressed private members' day. You gave some rationale of why there was limited attendance. The chairman mentioned some suggestions for improvement really for question period – how it operates, the length of it – and also supply, the 25 days of debate for that. Are there any comments that you wish to make on those aspects?

MR. GRAVELAND: I like the private members' day because you can get an awful lot of interesting debate on different issues. The problem is that in the media business as a whole there's been sort of a downturn. Most companies have been cutting back on the number of reporters they put out. There are limited abilities to cover, for instance, the evening debate. In the old days everyone was always there in the evenings when there was something debated. Now only perhaps the newspapers can have that many people. That's why you're suddenly seeing less focus on perhaps private members' type issues. You just don't have enough bodies and enough time, and your bosses say there's no more money, so you just make do with what you've got. Kind of like what government's trying to do now: consolidating and cutting back.

So like we've said before, there's nothing wrong with a government MLA holding a news conference to talk about his private member's Bill. I remember that Mr. Gogo before he was in cabinet embarrassed a few cabinet ministers with questions on the Landlord and Tenant Act, back when he was considered a maverick.

MR. GESELL: He's not anymore?

MR. GRAVELAND: Now he's a maverick cabinet minister.

You know, the media's not going to perceive that a government MLA having a private member's Bill talking on something is bucking party policy. If he just has something he wants to talk about, it's very interesting. A lot of people will go through the private members' Bills if they're just looking for stories to do. They look at the ones they find interesting.

MR. GESELL: Finally, Mr. Chairman, we've talked about attitude quite a bit, and the way I interpret attitude, it works both ways. It's a co-operative type of situation. If it's confrontational on one side, it tends to be confrontational on the other side. So I think we all on both sides have some work that we need to do in order

to reduce that confrontation that exists right now. I truly believe that it is there. Our efforts in talking with you to solicit some suggestions I think are an excellent first step to doing that. Some other suggestions that have been made would follow along in the same line, and hopefully we can establish a reasonable attitude whereby, sure, our jobs are similar but slightly different, where we respect each other, and do whatever we need to do in a co-operative fashion.

MR. SEREDIUK: What sort of power does this committee have?

11:14

MR. GESELL: Perhaps the Chairman could answer that, but we make recommendations to the Legislature.

MR. CHAIRMAN: "Power" is really not the word we ever use, but in terms of jurisdiction, the select committee of the House is authorized by the House to look into – if you don't have a copy of our mandate, we'll give you one, which was the resolution passed by the House – all matters that would benefit both the members and the public. It's almost an inexhaustive type of list. We will table it before the Legislature. Obviously caucuses will have a lot of say as to how it's handled. But given the current feelings of the public, I would sense there's going to be a dramatic change in the Legislative workings in this Assembly; i.e., the number one item that was raised was the election of the Speaker which, you know, is a major . . . Free votes have been mentioned. There is a wealth of information, for example, on everything we're talking about in terms of hours and so on. Louise has done a tremendous amount of research, and we have all the jurisdictions in Canada and what hours they sit. I can't prejudge what the committee is going to say. This would have to be ratified by other caucuses, but I sense a very great modernization of times. Like Dylan said, you know, the times they are a-changin' and you'd better get with it. I just sense that. In terms of our recommendations, I think they're going to be pretty extensive.

Before we hear from Derek, it seems to me that a major role the media could play – and maybe dealing with you, Don, is one of the routes other than getting your 40 sheets a day of press releases – is some suggestions for new cabinets in terms of communication, as to how they should be dealing with the media, recognizing that government, by definition, is cabinet and also making recommendations to caucus groups as to how they could interrelate with media. I've never seen any of that going on in a formal manner. I remember vividly the great press parties that were held, very friendly affairs. I don't see them any more.

I guess I keep coming back to the word "attitude." I'm not saying I know the secret to it, but frankly I do know that when one of you wants to talk to me and I'm in the House and I can get out, and if I'm House Leader I have a problem sometimes – for what it's worth, I just share this with you – I say, "Will you come to my office?" I use the time between here and my office to pump you as to what you want to talk about. By the time we get to my office, I've got in my mind how I'm going to respond. This is a tactic I probably shouldn't even share with you, but it works for me. [interjections] You know, I've never had a complaint with the way the media has treated me, and I think it's a question of fairness. If you recognize what the media must do, you've got to co-operate with them. I mean, I'm a politician and I'm not out to embarrass the government, but I try to do things in such a manner that it's fair to all, and I still get my story out. I don't mean 30-second bites, that kind of stuff. I've found it has worked

very well for me, and the only way I've come to that is as a result of watching others, I guess, over the years.

Derek?

MR. FOX: I'm just wondering. One of the recommendations Bob Hawkesworth and I have brought to the committee on behalf of the New Democrat caucus is that we advocate all proceedings of the Legislature be televised. It's done in the House of Commons and, I believe, in some other provincial jurisdictions. I'm wondering what your assessment of that would be. I should add that a surprising number of people watch the question period replay at 11 o'clock at night or whenever it appears. There are people who actually take an interest in what's going on here. I think one of the things we need to do in our efforts to make this place more accountable to Albertans is make it more available, open up the proceedings, make sure people see in its fullness what's going on and have an opportunity to, you know, better decide whether or not they want to take part in the process or have input or express their views on legislation. So I'm wondering what your assessment would be of the benefits – and maybe there's a downside – and liabilities of televising the legislative proceedings in their fullness. Are there any technical considerations you would know about that we wouldn't?

MR. GRAY: If you have a station that will run that, fine. I don't think we can add much to that.

MR. GRAVELAND: If you could do it, I'm sure you would get at least some more coverage of, say, private member's Bills, perhaps budgetary debates, and stuff like that. If a newsroom with a night desk or something could tune that in and perhaps lift a few quotes from it, that might improve.

MR. SCHUETTLER: When I was working in Ottawa, you know, I would be working on my main story of the day but would always have the television going in the background and be jotting down story ideas that came up during the rest of the debate that was going on. So in that way, sure. I mean, it helps reporters. You don't have to sit in the gallery and listen throughout the whole day.

MR. GRAVELAND: That's like after question period, Don. In the gallery we have the sound piped in, and if something hot pops up, we can usually run and start recording it.

MR. FOX: I guess it's my sense that it would be helpful for people out there, because not everything that goes on in this Assembly is confrontational and partisan. Question period, by definition, ends up being that way, but frankly I think a lot of the debates that occur after hours are very thoughtful and thorough. It would be good for people to know that – well, perhaps members who don't have access to question period, for example. I'm thinking in terms of government members. They don't have the same kind of access to question period as opposition members. It's good for people to know that they are standing up and speaking out and that there are issues of concern that arise that MLAs work on together and try and come up with solutions for, rather than this fairly limited view people have of what goes on in here, and that is, you know, bites from question period. I think a lot of the problems are procedural and structural, and if we can change that, if we can change the sitting times, improve access, open it up and televise the fullness of things here, that would go a long way to accomplishing our objectives.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I want to welcome Bob Hawkesworth, Calgary-Mountain View and the finance critic for the New Democrats.

Before we go to Brian, I can't help but recall Fotheringham's column. Some of you may recall that on his visit to Alberta, when the House was sitting he described it as a convent in recess. It's changed dramatically over the years, and I'm just wondering if certain people view the media as being the primary reason for the change. I don't know that.

Brian.

MR. EVANS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a comment on Derek's last point. I would hope that what we as a committee do here will result in some recommendations to make the Assembly more relevant, and I'd hope that would lead to more interest in what we're doing. But I cannot imagine for a moment under the current scenario that any commercial network would be interested in televising what we do throughout the day. I won't even ask you to comment on that. In my wildest imaginings, I can't imagine that that would be the case.

In terms of making what we do more relevant to your listeners, your viewers, your readers, do you have any suggestions for what we might do as politicians to assist the general public and thereby, I presume, assist you as well in delivering information to the general public?

MR. GRAVELAND: Do you mean from an MLA or government, or what?

MR. EVANS: I'm talking really about our process in the House, the way we do business. Perhaps you'd want to expand question period to two and a half hours because you might have a better opportunity there given the particular time of the day. Are there other things you think we could be doing that would make us more relevant to the 21st century? You know, a lot of things we do go back 150 years. We're dealing with age-old communication methods where today's world operates on a 60-second or 30-second bite. I know you folks have to work on that as well, and we're having a really tough time getting any kind of message across that people can comprehend. Certainly by running the House of Commons or running the Legislature in Edmonton, we're not going to come together with that 30-second or 60-second bite people depend on.

11:24

MR. GRAY: Maybe I can help you out a little bit on that. It's a question that any of you who have held a press conference more likely than not have heard, and it's most often the one reporters would use and, to be honest, is more often a 15-second bite. Just remembering what you're trying to tell people is the Johnny Six-pack question; you know, "How is this going to affect me on the street?" Don't forget that when you're talking about these weighty issues. I think that seems to be the problem. Everything, of course, can't be put into a 15-second bite – of course not – and these issues are much larger than just how they are going to affect one person. But just remembering that, what do you want to hear when you watch the news? You want to know how it's going to affect you or the people around you or the things you care about. I think that most often is what is forgotten by politicians. They talk about the procedure, the future, and often the process but rarely the relevancy of the issue.

MR. EVANS: Just following up on that, David. If we were to have a shorter time frame in which we could make a presentation

or respond to a Bill, a motion, et cetera, would that at least in theory address some of your concerns? I mean, you can still meander for 10 minutes just as easily as you can for 20. But if we compress that time frame, do you think that would make us more relevant?

MR. GRAVELAND: Probably it would help. Dennis Anderson has been talking a lot about plain speech. You know, you hear answers in question period or questions where they're using acronyms and stuff like that, and people don't have a clue. I used to think there was a rule that you had to say the whole thing at the beginning, but it doesn't seem to have happened over the last few years. Someone listening to somebody talking about NAFTA: the average guy on the street doesn't have a clue what that is. If they don't understand anything right off the bat, they just tune out. They don't listen or they don't read it. They just skip over it or flip channels. You know, probably the only listenership or readership around that might understand a lot of the more technical terms and stuff like that would be Darren's in the *Financial Post*.

Granted, with private member's Bills there are a lot of them like the Joe Who Such and Such Act. Unless they've got a real human interest angle to them or something that's really significant, you can have as many news conferences as you want on them and they're not going to get any play. If you are going to have something as a private member, you've got to have something that the average person can relate to. Like you say, you guys have millions of Acts, and they're so automatic that you just go plonk, plonk, plonk and they're through. But you're going have to plonk less; so it's a simplified version. You've got to have something a person can understand and would care about. Questions will come up and gallery reporters realize it's a good story, and politicians may really care about it, but if you really get down to it, most people tune out. You know, I don't think the average person understands much about NovAtel other than the fact that there was a half billion dollars lost. When you try to get down to the Auditor General's report explaining what's gone on, I don't think the average person understands. They just know there was a half billion dollars, and that's as far as they really care to understand it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You mentioned acronyms, Bill. A former Premier here did not allow acronyms to be used.

MR. GRAVELAND: That's what I remember.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The one exception to the rule was AOSTRA, the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority. That was the one exception to the rule. I remember a convention of my political party when AOSTRA was mentioned ad nauseam and the former Premier allowed it. A delegate got up and went to a microphone and said: "You know, I've listened to this for half an hour. I don't know what AOSTRA means, but it sounds so good I want to buy one." I've never forgotten that.

Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Bill, aren't we really talking about – and I appreciate your last comments and David's – why is question period the one that's televised? Why is it hot? It's because there's hype and excitement and interest in seeing the parry and thrust. The rest of it we don't make interesting in that same fashion. You spoke about our press conferences, and I asked a question on press releases. Any suggestions, any ideas there about how that whole process can be facilitated and can move better?

MR. GRAVELAND: Well, just from a personal perspective, I don't like to see more than one person at a news conference because if you get two spokespeople – and granted they may be related – it confuses it and you're getting two perspectives instead of one. Just chatting, I've mentioned to many of you that I'd always much rather have one person do it. With one spokesman you're not going to get off on any tangents; you're just going to get the one message across. You got your release and you've got that one person quoted. I don't know how many releases I've seen with three or four different people quoted. It might be good for newspapers, but from a radio perspective you just ignore one of the two people. You don't put out two or three different versions. You just put out the one because you don't have that much time or that much space.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I've also observed a change in the whole press conference mechanism since I've come here, where the individual calling the press conference no longer controls the agenda. This doesn't bother me. I think it's kind of interesting the way it's happening; that is, you call the press conference on subject A and explain it, and it may or may not catch a lot of interest, but you're there and the media's there and they get up and ask questions on subject B. That's fair game. As far as I'm concerned, any question you ask me is fair game; I don't have any problems with that. But there has been a real shift. So the agenda becomes your agenda, not mine. This is common throughout the country, I expect. Isn't it?

MR. GRAVELAND: Yeah, but there are some jurisdictions where they have someone from the gallery basically fielding the questions and saying you, you, you, that sort of thing.

MRS. HEWES: Right.

MR. GRAVELAND: Generally that's not a problem unless it's like a major announcement of some sort. Actually, you do control the agenda, because you're calling the news conference. You do put out your subject matter. A reporter never asks you to comment on something before you've had your pitch. So you still control that portion of it and any questions that come with it.

MRS. HEWES: And I can get up and leave obviously.

MR. GRAVELAND: Premier Getty's done that on several occasions, where he'll say, "No, I'm only here to talk about subject A." People will have 30 other subjects they want to talk to him about. He just walks away from the microphone.

MRS. HEWES: There has been a real shift in how those things are conducted since I first came here, where the item moves from A to B, my agenda to yours. As I say, I don't mind that. I think that's typical right across the country.

MR. GRAY: But that's the other side. If someone doesn't want to answer a question, just say: "No comment. I'll get back to you on that. I'll talk to you about it later." There's a worry in television with some politicians we talk to in the hallways here. The light comes on. It's like stunning a deer with your headlights. What do you do? Of course, Mr. Gogo always handles us fairly well. When I've talked to him in the past, it's simply: I'll get back to you on that; we'll talk about that later. Of course they would get a variety of responses including pit bull politicians coming up to my defenceless cameraman. But it simply is that: just say, "No comment," if the agenda is getting off you.

11:34

MR. GRAVELAND: Or you can just say that you will talk about that after the news conference, if you want.

MR. GRAY: Yeah. Each works as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Derek Fox had asked you the question about continuous television coverage of the session as opposed to just question period. I believe, Louise, Members' Services did a study on that. As I recall, it was \$2.2 million or \$2.4 million in terms of cost; i.e., it wouldn't just be Access, it would be other people. That information as to what that cost would be I think is available.

Any other questions?

I made these comments before to the committee, and in fairness to the members who are not on the committee, we're dealing with items such as members' statements, which would occur on Tuesdays and Thursdays or perhaps daily. They would eat into question period time. They're matters that we'll be dealing with. There's no question that if a member has a statement to make of a two-minute duration or whatever it's determined to be, that could well be the news item of the day, which would, I think, assist private members as opposed to members of cabinet. Later today this committee will be dealing with a shopping list - it's not a good term - of items that we should deal with, and we'll be attempting to break them down into what would fall under Standing Orders, what would fall under this, what would fall into that, that we'd like to see reviewed both from the point of view of our present system and what other jurisdictions are doing.

I know you in the media have an appreciation for what we call bibles, the *Erskine Mays* and the *Beauchesnes* of the system, where based on historical precedent ministers do not have to answer questions and so on. There's a crying need out there, I think, by the public. They want to hear the answers, and they're not getting the answers, and that's reflected probably in their attitude toward the politician. That's why in many ways he rates slightly below a used car salesman in terms of voter preference. I had raised initially several questions, and you've shared those with us: for example, physical access. I definitely am not speaking on behalf of the committee, but I think it's generally accepted: "Hey, come on; let's get with it. You know, we're in the dark ages." The other provinces: I'm not confident at this point how they handle the various media. We've had an indication of what perhaps other people think of the way we do things here.

As you know, the allocation of space in the House for electronics, mainly television, is now spelled out in a certain way. There's no wandering around and so on. I can't predict whether that will ever change, but the one constant theme I've heard, and I've had written comments from members saying: "Hey, I'm elected to represent my constituents, and, you know, no matter what I do, I can't seem to get a message across through the media. No one's ever around when I want to say something unless it's detrimental to government." That's something that maybe should be pursued and there have been some suggestions on how that could be pursued; i.e., they should be taking some initiative, you know.

Bob.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thanks. I may be asking a question that's previously been asked, but it's specifically from the perspective of a Calgary member. Do you have any comments about the use of the McDougall school site for press conferences and so on? Is that a good facility to make use of? I don't know

whether you have any experience or any feedback from the Calgary media about the use of McDougall school as a way of government and MLAs raising issues. Is it a good facility? How does it compare to what's available here and that sort of thing?

MR. GRAY: The times I've been at McDougall school, when I used to work in Calgary for a different station, I never had a problem, and when Stuart and I have been down there, we've had no problems with the McDougall school. Some of the other Calgary media may have a different opinion. In fact, the security guards are extremely helpful there. They'll look at the monitors and let you know when the politician is coming in from the parkade so you know when to be there. [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I just made a note of that.

MR. GRAY: They have coffee. They've been very helpful. They treat journalists like human beings. It's kind of a nice change.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, McDougall Centre is referred to as the Premier's office south. Some have related to it as the capital south. If you're from Calgary, you probably have some other definitions of it. It was interesting - I don't know who made the comment - minus 30, standing outside Government House waiting. Has anybody authorized the use of the museum as a place to wait? I'm not saying politicians and museums go together.

MR. GRAVELAND: Well, you can wait in the museum. I've been in the museum and watched desperately from the door as the politician I was looking for got out of the car and was in the door just like that, no matter how many screams and pleas. So like you say, unless they moved Government House, you know, like 200 feet closer to the museum, I don't see it as a . . . [interjection] There's an idea.

One other thing. You were talking about question period and all that sort of thing. I wouldn't mind seeing emergency debates and points of order dealt with off the top, because quite often we miss it because we have to run upstairs as question period is ending. I know that points of order always go at the end, but, you know, if it's an emergency debate, which happens occasionally, that's big stuff. It's obviously a big story, and unless you've got someone else who can sit down there and listen to it or stay up in the House and watch it, you're going to miss the people you're looking for coming out of the House because you never know when it's going to end. You just can't magically appear upstairs in front of the doors.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Deputy Chairman of Committees may have some comments on Standing Order 15 on this. I don't know. Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I take it you're saying that the point of order is to be dealt with at the time it's raised rather than at the end.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Uh huh.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As you know, that's the way it was, and that's not the way it is, the rationale being that question period runs by the clock and you shouldn't take from a member who wants to put a question. Matters of points of order, therefore, are dealt with

after the fact, which on a Tuesday and Thursday obviously takes you into private members' day.

Well, I really appreciate you people coming today. I'm not rushing you; we have 20 minutes. I see Mark Lisac in the background; it's not a bad place for Mark to be. Mr. Lisac, if you want to make a comment at all to the committee, of course these are public meetings. You're more than welcome to make your comments or put any questions.

I would like to sum up in the following way. I think you've made some good points. They relate primarily, if I read things right: number one, physical access to the decision-makers in the Legislature, which is the highest court in the province. There seems to be a matter of attitude; someone described it as a fortress mentality of keeping people either separate from the media or protecting people from the media, such as having arbitrary lines or configurations that prevent people from having access. That's kind of alien to my way of thinking, frankly. I think if you're doing your job and you're competent at doing your job, you should not be afraid of the media. You should be utilizing it, a bit like Mr. Hawkesworth utilizes it in Calgary with low rental and landlord/tenant problems. Two years ago he commanded the airwaves for almost a week, which I thought was a bit of a coup. I'm not being patronizing, Bob; I thought it was extremely well handled. You've recently seen major changes to the Landlord and Tenant Act, and I can't help but think that to a significant degree the way he utilized the media had an effect on the minister of consumer affairs in sponsoring that legislation. I'm being very frank about that.

11:44

We will be taking your suggestions into very serious consideration as the times unfold with this committee. I would make a suggestion. The press gallery consists of 22 or 23 people. Although Richard Helm is not with us, I think it might be meaningful, Bill, if you and your colleagues would come up with some written suggestions as to specifics or even emphasizing what we talked about here today that the committee could consider in its deliberations in the future. I'm sure the committee would find it extremely helpful. The matter of sitting hours we'll be dealing with at some point. It just may be that some of your suggestions dovetail with those kinds of things. I feel very strongly that here we are, situated almost in the heart of where 800,000 people reside, dealing with probably the largest corporation in Alberta in terms of dollars, yet evening after evening after evening there are not more than one or two people in the gallery. So I'm saying that I don't think we as legislators are doing our job, and part of the reason we're not doing our job is perhaps that we're lacking in co-operation with the media, whom we rely on to not only spread the message but to keep the democratic interests of Albertans alive. You're just not in there for the hot story, I'm sure, but it's a two-way street.

So with that I thank you very much for coming and look forward to your suggestions.

The plan was to reassemble at 2 o'clock, after lunch, and work out our priority of the items we should be discussing. We'd hoped to talk about some budgetary considerations in terms of setting the budget as well. Is there any other business that people want to discuss prior to reassembling at 2 o'clock?

Halvar.

MR. JONSON: I move we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour? We reassemble at 2 o'clock.

[The committee adjourned at 11:47 a.m.]

