

4:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 30, 1994

[Chairman: Mr. Day]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We'll call the meeting to order. It's great to see everyone.

MR. WICKMAN: We missed you too, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know. I'm glad you were able to overcome the grief and carry on.

I'll ask for approval of the agenda.

MR. BRUSEKER: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So moved.

Approval of January 25 committee meeting minutes.

MRS. HEWES: I'll move them, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

I appreciate the fact that we've tried a number of times, especially over the fall, to have meetings, and I think it's fair to say that there have been calendar difficulties all around the table. I appreciate everybody's indulgence in forgiving others for not being able to make it here or there or wherever it might be. I have some indication already of a couple of early departures, maybe around 5:15 or 5:30. Frank, you're also at 5:30?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes.

MR. BRASSARD: I have to leave at 5:15.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Unless there's something overwhelmingly pressing, then, we may look for around a 5:30 adjournment as people on all sides of the table seem to indicate that.

Congratulations to each of you in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on your new appointments, and we look forward with anticipation and . . .

MR. WICKMAN: I feel bad; I lost WCB.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. I was grieving myself over that particular loss.

So we're up to item 5. The Speaker's office sent to all of us a fairly extensive list of . . . [interjection] Does anybody not have the list of items suggested? Standing Orders item: anybody not have that?

MR. WICKMAN: No, I don't have it with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I should explain. Nick Taylor will be here momentarily. We brought his file for him.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will hold off having any life-changing votes before he gets here.

At the will of the table, what I would suggest is that rather than walking through that voluminous but nevertheless well-researched document, I would like to ask if there are specific areas that people would like to raise in terms of areas of concern. I suppose I could always optimistically hope that everything would be wonderful to everybody, but I don't know that that's the case. I think we may have a couple of things to bring up there.

MR. BRUSEKER: Let me start perhaps with a simple one, Mr. Chairman, if I may. I'm looking at Standing Order 37(3).

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Give everybody a chance to flip through their pages.

MR. BRUSEKER: And I'm looking at the proposed amendment document, not the Standing Orders.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. On the proposed amendment, yes.

MR. BRUSEKER: Number 37(3).

MR. SCHUMACHER: This is 36.

MR. BRUSEKER: Number 37(3) is at the bottom of that page, I think, Stan. You've got a section that's shaded in gray.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Oh, I see. Right; I've got it.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just as I read through it, I thought it could be simplified perhaps just a little more. The proposal is to eliminate distinction between tablings and filings, but the phrase "in quadruplicate" is duplicated. I thought that perhaps as an amendment to the proposed amendment, we delete, in the second line, "in quadruplicate by a member" because we've got it further on: "may be tabled, in quadruplicate, by a Member." Am I making myself clear?

It says: "Documents presented voluntarily to the Assembly, in quadruplicate by a member." Now, I'm suggesting that that phrase, "in quadruplicate by a member," could be deleted because it is repeated further down. It's just a grammatical thing; I thought it might be a simple one to address fairly quickly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. I'm not going to look for a vote on each one of these if I don't hear — there are a couple of different ways we could do it. There could be some heated debate on some of these items that might call for a vote, or there could be consensus, as I think we'll probably have on this particular one, or there may be a request. We want to stay open so that if one member suggests something, other members may say, "At our next meeting I'd like to look at the full implications of that and deal with it at the next meeting." So those would be the options that we'll approach that way.

MR. SCHUMACHER: So that is Mr. Bruseker's right in that suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, and I sense consensus around the table for that, so for ease of movement, we'll just move along on that. All I was saying was that if there was somebody who really felt constrained and wanted to look at that over the next couple of days and then deal with it next meeting, we would consider that option.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I've talked with Nick about this, and I think I can present it without his presence. Sections 11(1)

and 55(1). I appreciate that we had the election of the Speaker last time and that it went relatively smoothly, but Nick's proposal . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can we just have half a sec till we get it on our papers here. I hear the rustling of leaves. So it's 11(1) and 55(1).

4:40

MRS. HEWES: Election of the Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MRS. HEWES: The present method provides for the nomination of members of the House and their acceptance of nomination. Nick is suggesting that that is unnecessary and that it complicates the system of a free and open election and that we should go – and I think he proposed this before, Mr. Chairman – to the pope's method, if I can call it that. [interjections] Yeah, white smoke. That is that everyone, every member of the House, is assumed nominated. That is, no person is beholden to any other person for having nominated them as Speaker; every person is assumed nominated. Then the election takes place in that open sense, and the runoff happens from there. He thinks this is the proper and fair way to do it, assuming that it is the way it's done in other Houses as well. I think we did clarify that at the last meeting, didn't we?

MR. WORK: The House of Commons.

MRS. HEWES: The House of Commons uses this same method. Further to that, Nick's idea was that having elected the Speaker, which we agree with in principle – and if that method were satisfactory, we would support that – then in 55(1), further, it seemed to us that it wasn't necessary to elect the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairman. The government could well appoint those people. That is a rather more perfunctory kind of activity in that those people might well be appointed by the government, who are going to elect their people anyway. But the election of the Speaker should be totally open and without nomination. Perhaps you've got some thoughts about that.

MR. SCHUMACHER: I wasn't on the Gogo committee – Mr. Jonson was, I believe – but the idea of electing those people came from that committee. Of course, it was tried out initially with Mr. Main's election to replace Mr. Jonson as the Deputy Chairman of Committees. I wasn't involved in the process of developing that system, but I don't think I would say that the Speaker's office is married to any particular . . .

MRS. HEWES: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm not suggesting that the system is . . .

MR. SCHUMACHER: Now, whether Mr. Jonson wants to say something about the . . .

MRS. HEWES: I think it could be improved; that's all. I think we should look at going to the system used in the federal House.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have Calgary-Bow and Olds-Didsbury.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask David a question because I'm a little rusty on that too. Is that the case

where you have to declare you are not running and whoever is left without a declaration is considered to be a candidate?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. All the members of Executive Council are excluded, of course, and then there's the opportunity, I believe, for any others who want to indicate that they're not running to indicate to the Clerk by a certain deadline. Then the ballot contains everybody who has not declared.

One of the other approaches, which is done in Saskatchewan, is that any individual who is interested in running can submit his or her name up until 6 p.m. the eve of the night before the vote, and then all those people who submitted their names are on the ballot the next day. So that's another alternative, just so that you have a broader idea of what the alternatives are.

MRS. LAING: Who runs the election? That's the Clerk, is it? It varies, doesn't it, from time to time?

DR. McNEIL: Yes. Sometimes it's the Clerk. Other times it's the most senior parliamentarian in the House who is not a member of Executive Council.

MRS. LAING: Okay. Thank you.

MR. BRASSARD: My question was the same, Mr. Chairman, as Mrs. Laing's. The second part of the suggestion – that is, to have the Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chairman appointed by the government – I think defeats the impartiality that we're trying to establish here by having an elected official in the Chair. I think there are many times when it's necessary for the Speaker to be absent. Although he or she is not away very often, it could very well be at a critical time. I think the impartiality of that position is vital, and I would move that we leave it as is, where the Deputy Chairman and Deputy Speaker are elected.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Clint.

MR. DUNFORD: Am I up? Well, Mr. Chairman, and actually to member Hewes: did you not feel a certain honour, though, in being selected by your folks, you know, and being part of a runoff? I mean, I thought that was probably a nice little touch which wouldn't be there if we went to this suggestion that Nick has made.

MRS. HEWES: I appreciate the comment, Mr. Chairman, but I think my name could have been there in any event, so that wouldn't change my thinking about it one way or the other.

MR. DUNFORD: Yeah, but it would be by a process of elimination rather than . . .

MRS. HEWES: Yeah, that's true. But I think Nick's notion is that it should be as open as possible so that no person would be seen – for instance, I would not be seen to be beholden to my nominator, whomever that person might be, simply purifying the system as much as possible.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, your nomination would be pure. Okay. That's all I had, sir.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I have no problems with the notion of leaving the election for the other two officers. It just seemed that these are going to be people that inevitably would be

nominated by the government, but if we want to go through with an election for those two, that's all right.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, maybe it's difficult for her to answer in Nick Taylor's absence, but the question then to Mrs. Hewes: is Mr. Taylor proposing or would he propose the same concept for Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees if we were . . .

MRS. HEWES: In fairness, Mr. Chairman, we didn't discuss that.

MR. WICKMAN: It wouldn't be a bad idea to do all three the same way, Mr. Chairman, if I could, because you may find some members that would certainly like to let their nomination stand for the position of, let's say, Chairman of Committees. What I'm saying is that when you have a good thing, let's take it all the way.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Halvar, can you share with us what the discussion was when this system was adopted?

MR. JONSON: Well, I think when the system was adopted initially, there were two factors in mind. One was a process which, although it was an important one, provided for a fairly efficient way of getting to a decision. The second thing that was kept in mind is that all three of these positions – and the position in question at that time was Deputy Chairman of Committees – should be subject to, you know, nomination and election because all were officers of the Assembly as opposed to one particular side of the House. As I recall, probably the most lively and contested, if we can put it that way, election in the history of this process was for that particular position and went to two or three ballots, as I recall. In any case, my comment would be that I do think all three positions should follow the same process because they are all officers of the Assembly.

Secondly, I guess we could debate the significance of being nominated. A jester might say, well, it assures that you've got at least one vote with you when you're nominated. I think you have capable people on both sides of the House. If they feel there's somebody that should serve, they will nominate. If not, they won't. It tightens up the process and shortens it a great deal, I think, if there are the nominations that are called for.

I don't have any particular problem with the House of Commons system, but it does go on for a long time, and I think it sort of avoids getting to the point as far as the selection is concerned.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yeah. With all due respect, I can't see how this is really going to change the situation that either the government side or the opposition, whether there's one or more parties in the opposition, is likely going to have some preconceived notion as to whom they want for the position. I think we spend a lot of time in the House finding ways to use time inefficiently, and I'm saying this not in a derogatory way. I would think that what we're doing right now is the most efficient way of getting to the point of voting for one or two or three people, rather than having to eliminate possibly a dozen or more to get to the same point. While what you're talking about certainly would be perceived to be more open, I think in practice it really wouldn't be that, because the positioning and the homework would still be done behind the scenes and it would just be taking us more time to get there.

4:50

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments. Yes, we have to have efficiency. I'm all for it, and we've made some strides in improving how the House operates. But I think we have to do whatever we can to make the thing be seen as well as to be as open and as fair as possible. I think that's incumbent on us.

If you would like, Mr. Chairman, I'll move that we change the system to use the system used in the House of Commons.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have a motion. Understanding that when Bettie is saying a system like the House of Commons, it is the one where everybody is presumed to be nominated and then proceeds from there.

MRS. HEWES: Yes, and there are runoffs. As you go along, people are dropped off the list and so on.

Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. Do you have any data on that, Frank?

MR. WORK: Yes, actually we do, Mrs. Hewes. We just don't have it in this room. If the committee wishes, we can put something together for you for next time. I didn't even bring the House of Commons Standing Orders with me.

DR. McNEIL: If I could just add to that, at the last committee we provided a summary of various topics, and one of them was the election of Speaker. That has in detail the procedures for all the jurisdictions in Canada and some others as well. So that data does exist.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, the reason I asked is that it might be – I don't know whether it's important or not for new members of the committee to have a look at that, to review it once more before we make any precipitous decisions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So you'd like to table that motion or just withdraw it?

MRS. HEWES: No. I'll leave it there, and if anyone else wants to table it, I'd be happy to support that in order that the information can be provided.

MR. JONSON: I'll move to table.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Halvar moved to table.

MR. JONSON: Subject to receiving information, I move to table it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll make sure everybody gets that information.

In favour of that motion to table? Okay. Opposed? Carried. Okay. Next item.

MR. BRUSEKER: Looking at Standing Order 40, there's a proposal to reduce the speaking time, Mr. Chairman, from 20 minutes to 15 minutes. Now, the typical use of Standing Order 40 is a congratulatory message to some group, an athletic group, an individual for outstanding achievement of some type. I just don't see any point, quite honestly, in reducing the time from 20 minutes to 15 minutes. I don't recall that we've ever gone to any great lengths in dealing with that. I think that just for ease of remembering that speaking limits are 15 minutes at one point and 20

minutes somewhere else, I'd just as soon leave it at 20 minutes personally. I don't think that's ever been a problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Any further discussion on that?

MRS. LAING: I think 15 minutes is adequate, because most people can say whatever they want to say in that 15 minutes. Also, I mean, the motion has been walked, so to speak, onto the agenda. A lot of times, I think, if we had less time, we could certainly rap through it much quicker and get on to the normal business of the day. So I would like to see the 15 minutes myself.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. There are two points of view.

Any other discussion on that?

MR. FRIEDEL: I might as well get my two bits' worth in here too. I have said openly on many occasions that not only these but possibly all speeches in the House should be reduced to about 10 minutes, because if you can't say it in 10 minutes, it's probably not worth saying. Now, I know that many would disagree with me. I know that I'm not the most vociferous person in there. I certainly would agree with anything that would reduce the amount of time we spend on some of these things.

I would add, having made that 10 minutes in my opening comments here, that I've always suggested that maybe people should have more than one opportunity to speak but limit it to shorter speeches and that things might come out a little more concisely.

In any event, I do support the shortening of the speaking time on these.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other comments on that?

Frank, you raised it. What's your wish?

MR. BRUSEKER: Shall I make that a motion, then, Mr. Chairman, that we leave the speaking time under Standing Order 40 at 20 minutes, as it currently is?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. That's the motion. Everybody understands it? Any more discussion on that particular motion? In favour? Opposed? Okay. That motion is defeated.

I'm presuming, too, as I said in my comments at the start, that where we don't have particular items discussed, we're presuming consensus. We will allow time for members, either through communication through the House leaders — like, what I'm saying is that when we leave the meeting today, I don't want anybody leaving in fear that just because you didn't raise something today, boom, it's going to be done. We'll allow some respectable time just to make sure that that's understood. The only voting we'll actually do today will be on ones where there's a difference being expressed from what's here.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, just to finish up this particular item. Now that that motion has been defeated, are we then to assume that the 15 minutes is indeed going to prevail?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's correct. That would be the assumption, unless somebody raises it and wants it changed again.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, then do we assume that all of these are moved?

MR. CHAIRMAN: All of what we have before us?

MRS. HEWES: Yeah. That these items are all moved?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't want to make that assumption. What I want to say is that in not hearing dissention on particular ones, I'm going to assume consensus, but we will allow some time, be it a week or two weeks, for all parties here just to go back and make sure that they are comfortable with that. It won't be that when we walk out of here, everything we haven't debated is cast in stone.

David.

DR. McNEIL: Just in terms of the process, this committee would have to make a report to the House as to the recommended changes in Standing Orders, and then there'd have to be a motion proposed to concur in that and debate that report.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is by no means the last stop.

DR. McNEIL: A recommendation would have to come out of the committee as to what the Standing Order should be, and then the House would have to deal with those recommendations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In fairness, this is our first chance as a committee to look at these and hear what concerns one another has.

So I'd answer your question, Frank: yes, not hearing any other motion, we will assume that the consensus is that it's the 15.

MRS. LAING: May I raise one on 56, not just on the time element but the fact that they have five designated supply subcommittees? Now that we only have 17 departments, do we need to do this as much as we did earlier when we had 27 and we were always really pushed for time?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Just for clarification, that's section 56?

MRS. LAING: Yeah. "The Committee of Supply shall appoint five Designated Supply Subcommittees." I'm just questioning the need to still have those five designated supply subcommittees. You know, it was quite different when we had 27 and you often only had one chance at a department. For the last few sessions they come back two times or more. I'm just wondering: is there that urgent need to have those subcommittees?

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, you'll recall that you and I in a past life for one fleeting moment or two discussed some of these issues. As I recall, we exchanged memos but didn't come to any conclusion, and I think this one needs some further thought. I would have to say in response to Mrs. Laing that, yes, we still need the subcommittees. Our discussion, I think, revolved around whether we could reduce the number of designated days.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Correct.

MRS. HEWES: I'd not want as an opposition member to give up the subcommittees, because I think that if they are working as we had envisioned, it gives for a less formal opportunity to delve into the budgets of those departments and to have the senior officials from the departments present. I think all members of the Legislature have benefited from some of those discussions. I know we believe we have. So I wouldn't want to give up the subcommittees, but I think we perhaps should put our minds to the notion of

whether or not the number of days could be reduced because the number of departments have been reduced.

5:00

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. I appreciate that clarification. That is the difference. This in itself was a relatively new process, designating these five, and I think actually, Bonnie, you're on the same track to a degree. There used to be a lot more departments. Now there's less. Do we still need all of those estimate days? That was the issue that Bettie and I communicated on, and then with the change I also communicated that to Nick. Obviously there's been an interregnum period there, so that hasn't probably been addressed. Do you want to address it from that point of view, Bonnie, in terms of the overall number of days yet still see the subcommittees staying in place, as is indicated here?

MRS. LAING: Well, I was just questioning: do we need the subcommittees when we have the short time? For instance, 12 departments are examined in the Legislature, and then the other five are done in the subcommittee and come back just for that sort of wrap-up session. In this last session it got a little tedious in there at times when you were talking about the same department. People seemed to be raising almost the same type of question over and over again. You know, I'd just like to see it streamlined. If we're going to keep the subcommittees, then I definitely would like to see less days dedicated to supply.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So the question, then, is looking at the overall number of days or whatever else you had to raise there. Clint, go ahead.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I just want to say that I quite enjoy the designated supply subcommittees, but I would certainly speak in support of, you know, probably a pretty good reduction in the number of days. So I don't know whether I'm agreeing with Mrs. Laing or not. I think I am and certainly would want to. I really like the designated supply subcommittee concept.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It was a new concept that did seem to find favour.

DR. McNEIL: We've got the five designated supply subcommittees, which specifies the sort of minimum time you spend, then you've got the 25 days. So it's the five days and the 25. What Mrs. Hewes is suggesting is maybe trade off some of those 25 days given that you've only got around 17 departments and five of those go into the designated supply process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right. Leave the designated supply ones. Yeah.

MR. WORK: Mr. Chairman, just to follow on that. There are a couple of possibilities that we had thought about in the House or at the Table. One possibility is to count designated supply committee days as supply days. So that would automatically reduce you by five. If you count every designated supply subcommittee meeting as a supply day, five of the 25 days are taken care of. That's one possibility. Another possibility is just an outright reduction in the 25 supply days itself. Was there a third possibility? I can't recall. But those are the two ways it had come up in talking, you know, among the Table officers.

MR. BRUSEKER: The third option would have to be increasing the number of days; wouldn't it? That's the logical conclusion.

MRS. LAING: Not unless you have to stay there every day.

MR. WORK: I think the third option was something like peeling more into the subcommittees, like putting more departmental estimates into subcommittees.

DR. McNEIL: Whether they be designated supply subcommittees or some – you know, in the past there have been subcommittees of supply created.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, what I'm hearing is some consideration of looking at a reduction of the overall number of days but some concern about moving off the five designated ones. Is there a motion to that effect, in terms of reducing the number of estimate days either along the lines of the options that have been presented in information or some other hybrid thereof?

MRS. LAING: I'm just wondering if we should be making motions today. I think today we should just kind of be exploring some of these topics. You know, sometimes you sort of get an idea from the discussion that you might want to follow up on. I'm just wondering about making a motion today on some of these things. Maybe just use this as an exploratory day where we look at the different things.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As I said at the start, I'm leaving the options open. If there's comfort with a motion being made and agreement, then I'm all for getting business done as soon as we can do it, but we're not going to force or rush this.

Bettie, then Roy.

MRS. HEWES: I think this is a significant one, Mr. Chairman. I think it's one of the ones that we probably should leave on the table. The options I think are pretty clear: one, leave as is; two, reduce the number of days in total for the Committee of Supply; or three, discontinue the subcommittees. Or some combination of those. Look at that, take it back to our respective caucuses, and come together again. I think that if we table it with the understanding that those are the options – maybe there are others, but that's all I see.

MR. BRASSARD: That's exactly my point. I was going to ask that this be tabled, because it seems ludicrous that we've got the Committee of Supply sitting for 25 days when we've got 17 departments. It seemed a bit redundant, especially when we've got five designated days as well. So we are tripping over each other.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, then can we ask the members – this will be tabled – to take this away and look at the options with the point of view of coming back with a suggestion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The options as outlined by Bettie. It's in *Hansard* now, so I won't run through them all again. I think we know what they are.

MRS. HEWES: Before we leave that subject, Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I could just raise another one that I think needs a little massaging. You and I also talked about how we could make those designated committees work a little better. I'm not sure that we can write anything into the rules of the game, but perhaps at some point we might have some discussion and even have the chairs of the committees meet with us to see if we could improve and speed

up the process of discussion in those committees. I think they have been useful, and I think they could be more so if we can agree to some sort of general rules of how they are run.

MR. JONSON: Could I ask a question, please, Mr. Chairman? Could the previous speaker just clarify: what do you mean by speed up? Maybe I could just make a comment, and that is that having had a little bit of experience in the subcommittees, it seemed, at least in my experience, that people did want to ask questions. It is quite true that some of the questions were rather lengthy. I think my answers were shorter than the questions. I just wondered if you could clarify that.

MRS. HEWES: I've only had experience on one committee, Mr. Chairman, and the rules were the same as those in the House; that is, you were allowed one question and two supplementaries. Those rules were established by the chair and were incontrovertible. I found that quite stifling, because the answer that came to me, either from the minister or from some of the staff people, who were eager to share information with us – then I had to stop my line of questioning while somebody else had a chance. I agree that we should all have opportunities. But the one, two, three and you just got into some subject matter and you were off to somebody else who asked a question about another line in the budget, I didn't find as productive in arriving at a good information exchange as it might have been. That's all I'm speaking about, Mr. Jonson.

5:10

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate those comments. Fair enough. But I had trouble relating if that is the point of view to speeding things up.

MRS. HEWES: Have I cleared that up?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You cleared up what your concern was.

MR. JONSON: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you want to make known some of the other suggestions you might have in terms of improved time in that committee so again people can be thinking about this?

MRS. HEWES: The allocation of time to each member. The Speaker's just suggested another way of doing it, and I think we could think about that a bit more. Perhaps the chairs of the committees themselves might have some ideas for us, Mr. Chairman, about how that information exchange could be more productive.

The other one is that it is difficult for committee members to address questions to specific staff people, and I think that should be possible; that is, I think I should be able as an MLA to ask a question to the deputy without having it redirected by the chair. A little fine point, but that's the kind of thing that I think adds to the kind of defensive, confrontational position you get into, Mr. Jonson. I think we tried to eliminate that. That was one of the reasons that we have these subcommittees: to try not to have sort of "I talk; you listen" and have a more open exchange.

The other thing we talked about, Mr. Chairman, if I can just finish. In the Committee of the Whole House you and I discussed ways to improve the business where the minister speaks for 30 minutes, the opposition critic speaks for 20 minutes, the minister answers for 20 minutes, a government member speaks for 20 minutes, and, you know, we're through. The two hours are gone. There should be some way we can compress some of that time.

I'm not sure I'm being very helpful to the committee here, but this is a problem that we encounter, where there's a lengthy description by the minister and that uses up at least a quarter of the time that's there for the debate.

MR. JONSON: If I could comment, Mr. Chairman, on the hon. member's comments. I realize that we would come back and discuss these further but having sort of been involved in this in different roles, I don't think we can have it both ways in the sense that the minister is the person whom you and the Legislature hold responsible for the expenditures of that department, and therefore, quite frankly, quite bluntly, I think the minister must be the person who is questioned. Rightly so at the subcommittee meetings we have resource people available, but I think if you're going to be the person who is the person responsible, then you have to be able to answer yourself preferably or look to the resources that are under your purview. I think that's a very important principle involved here if we're going to value the principle of the minister being held responsible.

The point that the hon. member makes, Mr. Chairman, with respect to budget debate – and I won't make any fortuitous comments about budget debates that I've been witness to or even taken part in. I think the point the hon. member makes about the timing of speeches or questions following the remarks of the minister and maybe it's not necessary but perhaps the opposition critic – after that perhaps we should as a committee consider shortening up the length of those speeches. I think that quite often I agree with the hon. member, if that's what she's referring to, that there are many hon. members who would like to participate in a budget debate but because of lengthy speeches time runs out. I think that's something we should think about but come back to.

MRS. HEWES: Both sides of the House. I agree.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think, too, from the point of view of information, because we have Table officers here – and I know all of us observe the process. Is it fair to say that that's a minority of times that that actually happens: a full speech by the minister, a full speech by the opposition critic, and then maybe one or two more? Is not the majority of time – correct me if I'm wrong – that list at the chairman's table is actually usually fairly long, quite a few people? Just clarify for a point of information.

DR. McNEIL: I think that's the case, but in a lot of instances the list is not dealt with completely. There are a lot of people that are still left on the list at the end of the evening typically when it's dealt with.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can I ask then, Bettie, are you suggesting that actually in Standing Orders there be some guideline or directive, or that this be looked at as something that by convention we would pursue a little more vigorously to try and respect?

MRS. HEWES: I think the latter, Mr. Chairman. You and I also discussed the declining number of minutes, if you recall, and that's another idea that I think could have some merit, but we really need to think through them more.

MR. WORK: Mr. Chairman, if I may as a matter of information on the side of convention. Committee members may not be aware that in Canada Alberta is very generous in terms of speaking to the estimates before the House. In other words, in my limited experience you can range much more far and free in Alberta than in a lot of other jurisdictions when dealing with a department's

estimates. Now, that's simply an observation, but if you're talking about ways of saving time, that's one consideration. That's a fairly long-standing tradition of this House, to allow a great deal of latitude. That latitude takes time obviously.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's a good observation.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move into a new area if we've concluded here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We understand, then, that this is an area to pursue.

Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Well, I had my hand up before, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry. I didn't see it.

MRS. LAING: When we're talking about time, I can't see why again the follow-up speakers after the minister and the critic – the critic has half time, and then every speaker thereafter has 10 minutes. I think that would sort of tighten the arguments and would get us away from a tour of Alberta, which sometimes we get, and would be very succinct. I think that would really focus on the estimates themselves. I would like to suggest something in that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I think that's along the lines of what Bettie was saying that she and I had talked about before. There's actually in the House of Commons – I don't know about other Legislatures – a sort of declining time limit that was drawn there.

DR. McNEIL: Just further to that, in other instances where I've observed there's more of a question and answer format in the House. A member may have five minutes, but there's an exchange in that member's five minutes or 10 minutes so that there's more information, you know, a question-response type situation. It minimizes the lengthy speeches in that sense. So that's another way to think about it in terms of changing the situation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So that will be another item for analysis and then bring it back to a conclusion, hopefully, in our next meeting.

Percy, you had another area?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, if we could for a minute go to section 56(8), which is dealing with the designated supply subcommittees as well. Mr. Chairman, an area I think we should give some consideration to, some thought to, is where it reads:

No substantive vote shall be made in a Designated Supply Subcommittee except

(a) to make recommendations to the Committee of Supply.

I do have some difficulty with that. From any experience I've had with any type of subcommittee process, unless one is assuming that the members of that subcommittee can't behave or think in a responsible fashion, I don't see anything wrong, quite frankly, with motions being passed to correct any shortcomings that may be within that particular budget which are so clear and blatant that they should be corrected and then have that document go back to the main body corrected.

5:20

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any comments on that?

MR. WORK: Mr. Chairman, there's a principle that you should be aware of there in that the fundamental principle of the supply process is that the Crown requests supply and the Assembly grants it. I'm not sure if I understood Mr. Wickman correctly or not, and I might not have, but the bells went off in my head about the possibility of anything other than the whole Assembly dealing with the Crown's request for supply and, let me say, dealing with it in a final sense. So it's kind of a fundamental principle that the Assembly as a whole should have the ultimate say on the Crown's request for supply. Did I miss something?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, I believe you have. The report that goes from that subcommittee back to the main body can be changed again if in fact that subcommittee did something so blatantly wrong. That would be fine.

Let me use an example. I can recall one particular session where the Committee of the Whole was debating a particular budget, and there was an item in there for \$1 million, a grant to be given to some company that was no longer in existence. Now, despite the fact that that was clearly pointed out, government members did not accept an amendment that came forward at that time by the other opposition party, and the budget proceeded on that basis. What I'm saying is that if that were to occur in one of these five designated departments, rather than have that budget go back with such a blatant error and cause that embarrassment, we could correct it at that particular level and have the budget go back clean to the Committee of the Whole. There still is that final mechanism. That final check is the Committee of the Whole and then the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In the interest of time, as we've had members around the table indicate that they're going to be leaving at 5:30, can we put this down as another item?

MR. WICKMAN: That's all I want: some thought.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Halvar.

MR. JONSON: Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman. I think that the very important point here, though, is that while there's a great potential, I think, for our designated subcommittees to do good work and make recommendations, I really think that we've got to watch our parliamentary tradition. It is the Committee of Supply that makes the decisions which in turn have to be ratified by the Assembly of the province. Maybe I'm misunderstanding things here, Mr. Chairman, but what's being said here is that a subcommittee could make a decision. Even the Committee of Supply has to be responsible to the total Assembly by way of report. I think the objective can be accomplished through recommendations of the designated supply committees without going that very I think unwise step of them making a decision themselves.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Can I raise a new point?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. That's the food for thought on that one.

Okay. Thanks, Percy.

MR. BRUSEKER: Two issues I'm looking at in 8(3). Just a request, perhaps, to the Speaker in that we had some direction given as to the process to be adopted with respect to motions for returns and written questions. I'm suggesting that the Speaker's

office might want to consider an amendment to Standing Orders to include that direction in here for future reference by adding it in. We did get a letter from the Speaker that went to all members, but I think that might be worthwhile if it were to be an amendment in Standing Orders. I'm raising that as a suggestion for the Speaker to give consideration so that the procedure is clear in Standing Orders.

MR. SCHUMACHER: I will bring a proposal to codify that ruling to the next meeting for you to look at.

MR. BRUSEKER: Sure. I think it should be something that we would include there as a new standing order or sub standing order. You know, it might be 8(3)(a) and (b) or something to deal with those two particular issues.

If I can, just across the page there on section 8(5), talking about 5 minutes for the mover to close debate. I wonder, just in terms of a mechanism, is it the intention that debate would be cut off after, for example, 115 minutes, and then whoever was speaking would be just cut off, and the mover, whoever it is, would be asked to respond? The Chair would then intervene at that time.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Yes.

[Mr. Jonson in the chair]

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is there anything further with respect to this review?

I think the understanding, then, is that all of us at the table will take responsibility for reviewing the Speaker's suggestions. We'll take into consideration the discussion that we've had at the table this afternoon and come back prepared to deal with this item at our next meeting.

MRS. HEWES: Next meeting date, Mr. Chairman?

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: The man who knows such things, but he has his advisers here, can inform us of what might be proposed.

MRS. DAWSON: I'm not sure. I think we'll have some discussion with the other members and get back to them.

MR. WORK: Mr. Chairman, I was just wanting to make an offer to all the members on the committee. The Clerk's office and Parliamentary Counsel office have some resources on parliamentary matters. We have all the Standing Orders from all the Canadian jurisdictions, and we do have some other materials like that. I'm not sure how much time we have to do research for people, but we have resources and we can help. If during the next weeks while you're considering this stuff any of you want to avail yourselves of that, you're welcome.

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, and I know all members appreciate the backup, the resources, and the help that the Speaker's office and the Assembly office give us.

[Mr. Day in the chair]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I think the committee is about ready to adjourn, but they were looking for your advice. I don't think we're going to arrive at a meeting date tonight, but they want the procedure for arriving at our next meeting date and time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll be sending out immediately the list of areas that have been raised tonight so that everybody has that and doesn't have to pore through *Hansard*. We'll get that out to you.

Am I being too optimistic in suggesting a mid-December next meeting? I'm looking at when we go back into session sometime in February, we definitely need time to come to agreement. January can be a tricky month. Are people comfortable with that time frame: sometime the week of December 12?

MR. SCHUMACHER: Hopefully not the 15th.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let's say mid-December. Is anybody feeling that we're rushing it too much if we're looking at that?

MRS. HEWES: Yeah. Sorry about that.

MR. JONSON: Well, the 23rd is good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: One person has recommended the week of the 23rd. I'm a little busy around the 24th myself.

Okay. There's some concern there, so we'll look I think early in January, then, at getting a date out to you. The information will get out to you as soon as possible.

I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. So moved. In favour?

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

MRS. HEWES: Right on time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you all.

[The committee adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]