

6:15 p.m.

Wednesday, January 10, 1996

[Chairman: Mr. Day]

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you all for coming. Please feel free to continue to munch and run to the table as the need may be, as the meeting wears on, the midnight hour approaches, and you get a little hungry.

I'll call the meeting to order and ask for approval of the agenda as before you.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if we could include an item, perhaps after 3, of items arising. There are one or two things pending that I'd just like to ask questions on.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. If it's not directly related to that, do you want to put it under 6, Other Business? Does it fit there, or would you feel better with it at 3?

MRS. HEWES: I don't care.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Let's put it at 6, if that's okay. So you've a couple of items?

MRS. HEWES: Arising from the minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, arising from the minutes. Okay; right after 3. Sure. Yeah.

Percy.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. I have two items as well. They may be the same two that Bettie is referring to but also matters arising as a result of the minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Approval of the agenda then. So approved, Halvar. Bettie. Thank you.

Approval of the minutes as distributed. Halvar. Thank you.

Okay, Bettie, on business arising from the minutes.

MRS. HEWES: Just a couple of things, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. On 5.94, item 5, it says that I raised on Mr. Taylor's behalf – Mr. Taylor being here may want to speak to it – a method of election of the Speaker. I realize that this isn't imminent, but it seems to me that we were going to get some further information. I wonder if that's been procured and circulated. I don't seem to have seen it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Everybody's sort of looking at each other here. I don't know what to say on that. It indicates that Dr. McNeil offered to provide some committee members with a summary prepared. That's the bottom of 5.94, and I can't recall if that happened or not.

DR. MCNEIL: I can't recall either. If it hasn't been done, we'll do it.

MRS. HEWES: I just don't want to lose it, Mr. Chairman, forever. Perhaps we could put it on the agenda for the next time around.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. That'll be on the agenda, and Dr. McNeil will follow up. Thanks, Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: The next one I have is the item on the special committees on parliamentary reforms. If I remember – it's a long time ago, Mr. Chairman – we had a discussion about how effective those committees were, and we've had at least one experience between the time these minutes were taken and now. So we've had some experience. I wondered if we think this is working. The last paragraph says that you, sir, recommended that the discussion on the Committee of Supply and designated should be revisited and possibly concluded at the next meeting. Was it your intention to bring it forward? Did you have any comments for the committee in that regard?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, if I can address that specifically. Following some of the concerns raised, you'll remember that Frank Bruseker and I sat down then, and there were some changes that were made. I don't think it had to be done with Standing Orders. It was more procedural. For instance, the way in which questions were answered was a concern of members from your caucus, that it had to be a main question, supplementary, supplementary, and then passed. So we did get members of those committees to agree to that change.

Then there was a concern about ministers possibly using up too much time in their opening comments. We addressed that with our ministers, and from the feedback I got from Frank, there was some improvement there.

So those particular areas which you had raised specifically were then followed up by Frank and myself, and some adjustments were made, maybe not in every area but in some of those.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I don't know how to get it back into the discussion then. Perhaps we need to remind the ministers and committee chairs once again, as we approach the budget, of the sort of gentlemen's agreement on how those committees would function and how ministers would perform in the House.

THE CHAIRMAN: I can take the necessary steps to do that.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Well, I think that members of cabinet had certain reservations about the process too, but we realized that it was a decision of the Assembly, and we've certainly endeavoured to co-operate and work with the subcommittee process. As you said, Mr. Chairman, there were some adjustments that were made interim through the process. As I understand it, things have been adjusted and the ministers of cabinet are prepared to go forward with the subcommittee structure into the future. I guess the reason I'm speaking here is that there's no problem with the adjustments, the corrections, that have been in the process as far as cabinet members are concerned, and we're supportive of the subcommittee process, but maybe it can be enhanced.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Bettie, what I'll do in communicating back to ministers is acknowledge and appreciate that changes and adjustments have been made and encourage them to continue along that line.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you.

The other one I have – it's the only other one, Mr. Chairman – is Standing Order 8(3). The Speaker, according to our minutes, had agreed to bring a proposal to the next meeting. I don't recall ever seeing anything. I know the Speaker has kind of tried to help us, but we're all still a little clumsy sometimes when we get to that section. Perhaps a memo from the Speaker just outlining

who says what and when might once again, before the House convenes, be of help to us.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other comments or thoughts on that?

MR. JONSON: What was the reference there, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Standing Order 8(3). It deals with Wednesday afternoon's order of business after the daily routine: Written Questions, Motions for Returns.

DR. McNEIL: As I recall, the Speaker sent a memo to the House leaders summarizing and reviewing the process, because there were changes under '94 or '95 Standing Orders, changes from what we had practised before. I believe there's a memo that went out to the House leaders, anyway, if not all members. Maybe it bears repeating that memo just to remind people at the start of session.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Some members, maybe if they're not dealing with it every day, aren't aware of it, but he had given the guidelines that we're agreed on. We can circulate that again too. I think there's still some confusion from time to time. Amendment: "Do we debate now? Am I closing debate?" That type of thing.

MRS. HEWES: That's right. It's time consuming, and people get angry and uptight about it. So let's clear it up if we can.

THE CHAIRMAN: Uh huh. Okay; we'll get out the Speaker's guidelines and circulate them again.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you. That's all I had, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Bettie.

MR. WICKMAN: Bettie's covered one. The other one pertains to a question on page 8.94 under Standing Order 8(5). Reference at the end is made:

The Chairman stated that a summary of the Committee's discussions would be sent out shortly, in order to help Members prepare for the next meeting.

I can't recall specifically what discussions were being referred to and whether that summary was ever sent out.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. It was. It was sent out. Again, it's been a while, so we will recirculate that as a refresher for people.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. I just wasn't sure, Mr. Chairman, how it related to help members prepare for the next meeting. I assumed "next meeting" was referring to this meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. At that time, given the heady atmosphere of this fast-moving committee, I think we thought we'd be meeting quite regularly but realized our work was so profound that we didn't have to do that again.

MR. WICKMAN: Maybe when the minutes are circulated like this prior to a meeting – even if those memos that are being now referred to in summaries were included as part of the minutes, it would help committee members refresh themselves as to what memos and what summaries were sent out; in other words, what was followed through and what wasn't.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's a good suggestion. We'll put down "action requested" and "action followed."

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you.

6:25

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

We'll move, then, directly to the proposal that was sent out. Does everybody have a copy? Is anybody lacking a copy? Just to give you the history quickly and a brief overview again by way of a reminder. What we wanted to do tonight was look at any possible problems, difficulties that we may not have anticipated in terms of moving in this direction. What we are looking at doing is something that is done in other jurisdictions, not just in estimates but also in committee on legislation. Of course, we're only looking at estimates themselves but, to make it as brief as possible, having the possibility of two departments' estimates being done simultaneously on the same evening and a way to do that. Certainly we've learned some things from the designated supply subcommittees, although it's not an exact parallel situation.

By allowing that to happen, by having the Committee of Supply so designate, which they can do now with the existing Standing Orders, we would have a situation where we would have the same amount of debate time if not more debate time and, we believe, a more focused and intensive scrutiny, as we find it happening in the designated supply subcommittees. Yet by having two estimates done in the same evening, obviously you're reducing the number of calendar days required to be considering estimates but allowing the same if not more time on the estimates themselves. So we're looking at a cost saving overall of running the business of the Assembly but in no way minimizing the actual time spent.

My first discussions with the Opposition House Leader on this about a year ago, where I'd presented him with the proposal and which he indicated to me he would take to caucus – and as I understand, he did, being about a year ago. I understand that with the opposition caucus there was not – what should I say? – an overwhelming sense of approval to proceed along those lines at that time. Since then, it's been discussed again informally with the Opposition House Leader and others, and there still seems to be some questions about it. We've looked at it. We feel pretty succinctly. I think there are probably still some logistics that have to be worked out and some things that we'd like to be aware of, but the proposal is that on a given night the committees would be broken down, as indicated to you. We would look to both parties to establish membership on those committees. We would ask the opposition to indicate to us the schedule that would best suit their needs and see if we can accommodate that with our own ministers, members of Executive Council, so that ideally people would have well beforehand the calendar. They would have the dates and which estimates would be considered which evenings. It would still allow for the opposition to designate on a Thursday afternoon.

Basically the rules that now apply in Committee of Supply would be the same rules in the subcommittee, though one location would be different, obviously. One subcommittee would meet in the Assembly itself, and then the proposal is that the other subcommittee would meet in room 512, an area cordoned off just for the elected members, much as happens right now in some of the SPC meetings. All the same rules would apply. There would be some informality. Members could move around the table, obviously, as we do now, and sit and discuss. Information required by members, be they members of Executive Council or others, would again be transmitted the same way, via the pages to whatever information source they're requesting.

Following the time of consideration of the estimate of that particular subcommittee, they would rise and report. As with the designated subcommittees there'd be no substantive votes, and the

reporting back to the Assembly would follow along the same lines as we've done with the designated supply committees: on certain nights a certain number of departments reporting back in the Assembly in Committee of Supply as far as how those individual subcommittees went. The reporting would be along those same lines.

So that's the thumbnail sketch. There's been a lot of work that's gone into it to try and make it as easy a transition as possible, but I don't presume and none of us who have worked on this would presume to have anticipated every possible pitfall that may arise from it. That's the purpose of this agenda item, so that we can look at that so we can proceed with this in the spring session and hopefully have the wrinkles proverbially ironed out before we get there.

So I'll open the table for discussion on it. Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, just so I'm clear in my mind. There's nothing to prevent any member from attending a specific committee meeting that they have a particular interest in. For instance, if I happen to be on committee D while estimates are being listened to by committee B, I could still attend that meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Correct.

MR. BRASSARD: There wouldn't be anything to restrict movement and attendance at any of the meetings. Am I right?

THE CHAIRMAN: No restrictions at all and full participation in discussion and debate. The actual voting members would be designated just as they are in designated supply committees or in any subcommittee, but, absolutely, all members would be able to exercise their full freedoms in the subcommittees.

MR. BRASSARD: So, in essence, the bottom line would be that it would just make our time more productive.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's correct.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

MRS. HEWES: Well, Mr. Chairman, with respect, I'm not sure the time would be more productive. I have had a brief discussion with the Opposition House Leader on the matter, and he has not changed his opinion. I hope he's transmitted that to you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah, he has.

MRS. HEWES: I think that from our perspective all members of the opposition want the opportunity, an open opportunity, to participate in the estimates of every department, and I think they feel that responsibility and that accountability very strongly. While I appreciate the work that's gone into this and, you know, I'm sure it would work, it would thwart that capacity of opposition members for that full participation. You would have to make choices; there's no question.

The other thing, of course, and no secret: we don't want to reduce the number of days we have an opportunity to go through question period. I mean, this is very obvious. Question period is our opportunity to question the government. It's our responsibility. It is indeed our obligation. It is a requirement, and we feel that very strongly. Anything that is done to inhibit or truncate that I think is not really in the spirit of what we believe we're there for. So while I know and I appreciate your sincerity in saying this would save money and so on, I believe it would also

inhibit the process that we believe we must maintain.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, Bettie, surely the session has got to be more than just simply question period, and I hope that we're not going to drag out a session simply to enhance a forum to have dialogue between the government and the opposition in question period. I think there's got to be more to it than that. There have been times when I've sat there in Committee of Supply and the attendance was abysmal, and to think that we're going to perpetuate something that's ineffective simply so that we can enhance a question period I don't think is valid. That's my own personal opinion.

MRS. HEWES: I'd like to respond, but I'll give it to Nick.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Well, just in answer to the Member for Olds-Didsbury, we're talking about the maximum. Whenever both sides of the House feel that the Committee of Supply has been exhausted, you can always shorten it up. It's only if the opposition or the government wants to continue that it goes to the full length. If indeed it is as you say – the public is making a big uproar, and they want it over with; it's been too long, and we're not covering anything – it's very easy for us to do it. But we're just talking about that extreme case. Who knows? You might be in the opposition – stranger things have happened – and you might want to inquire and hold the government of the day to the task. So you'll want that length of time to develop . . . Question period I think – how often that comes up – has already been decided, because the government has shortened question period by having evening sittings. A lot of Legislatures don't sit in the evening, but by sitting in the evening you speed up the whole process and cut the question period already. So the idea of speeding up the process or slowing it down is indulged in by both sides.

6:35

MR. BRASSARD: But in fairness, Mr. Chairman, wouldn't we be far better . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we'll have to stick to the speaking order. Percy was next, and I've got you on the list after Percy anyway.

MR. BRASSARD: I'm sorry.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I think the objective of the exercise really should be not a matter of shortening the number of days of estimates but accepting the fact that we do have a maximum of 25 days for estimates and trying to improve the quality of not only debate but the quality of opportunity for questions, the overall impact that we have as legislators in terms of protecting the taxpayers' dollars. I never have a problem with reform in that sense: looking at a system and finding ways of improving it. You know, you could partially be on the proper track if you were to say, "Look, we're breaking it down into four groups." Then when you look at the reporting procedure, to respond to Bettie's point, I agree with it, that we still need that opportunity for the full interchange, the full debate of all members of the House, rather than have three departments, if you report on day 8 or whatever, you just have one. In other words, you have the two-step process. You have the designated areas, and then when you go back into the House, you go through it again, but just one a night and don't repeat that one a second time. We would still end up with approximately 25 days, but it could be more meaningful.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's actually 20 days right now.

MR. WICKMAN: Or 20 days. Yeah, somewhere along the line we did agree to reduce it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MR. BRASSARD: I guess my final comment on this is simply that I think that that time could be spent far more meaningfully on proposed legislation than on estimates that are published, that are established, and so on. I just think that if we can save four or five days and utilize that more efficiently and to the overall benefit of Albertans, then that's what we should do.

MR. JONSON: I guess as I advance in age, one maybe could question one's memory, but I think, at least as I recall, the subcommittee structure which has been adopted in recent history was advocated by government but also certainly by the opposition. In terms of it being more face to face, we had the possibility, at least, of a more productive and intensive debate. As a cabinet minister – not at the time it was proposed, but now – one has one's reservations. But I would say that as the subcommittee structure has worked out to this point in time, at least, with certain refinements which were alluded to earlier this evening, it's working.

I reiterate that this was something, as I understand it, that was favoured by the opposition. Here we're looking at a process of expanding and enhancing that process, at least the way I look at it, so I have difficulty understanding why we'd be opposed at this particular time. This is budget estimates. We're looking at a way of examining carefully the expenditure plans of the government, the revenue plans as well quite frankly. I think we have to be alert, we have to not be complacent, because we've only had a limited amount of experience with that. But I think the structure that is proposed here is in keeping with what both the opposition and government sides of the House have been saying.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I can add, just from the Chair's viewpoint, in terms of information, that's correct. I think opposition members here would recognize that they did support the designated subcommittee structure. Further to that, just so the government doesn't appear to be trying to steal the limelight on coming up with the idea of the four subcommittees, it was actually somewhat appropriated and borrowed from a motion by Sheldon Chumir back in 1991, which actually I see Bettie supported. So I don't want to take all the credit for the idea, nor does anybody else. There was a motion at the time, an interesting one, striking four subcommittees for consideration of estimates of Committee of Supply, so recently and also in 1991.

I've got Bonnie, Gary, Bettie.

MRS. LAING: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I see with the four subcommittees a better opportunity for especially the backbench members to have more participation in the debate. Many times as a government member you sit there with your little points all ready to go, and you run out of time. You never get the opportunity to say them. So I think in a smaller venue you would certainly have more time to participate as an individual, and I think that would be more profitable and certainly more meaningful for people too.

MR. FRIEDEL: First of all, Mr. Chairman, a clarification. When we're talking about the number of days that the House sits, it's not necessarily a function of the number of days you debate

in the Committee of Supply. Would it not be as much the amount of legislation and that kind of business that's on the agenda as well? This wouldn't necessarily cut down or restrict the total number of days. Am I correct, first of all, in that assumption?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, that's correct, and all of us only know too well that the length of session is determined by the amount of legislation, for sure.

MR. FRIEDEL: Then having said that, I would have to suggest that a lot of times the length of the session depends upon the endurance capacity of the rear end after three months or so. I recall in my short stint in this Assembly that we sometimes see legislation sitting there because people just get tired of debating. I think that has more of a significant effect on the number of days we sit here.

Also on the practical end of it, it has concerned me sometimes, the amount of time we spend in the evening with people sitting around in the Assembly and, with all due respect, contemplating just about everything except what is being discussed. It strikes me that if the only reason we're discussing or debating this is whether or not we can prolong the session, I have problems accepting that in exchange for what I think we could accomplish here in meaningful debate. In a smaller group I believe more people would participate actively. I think in the smaller groups also it would be more enticing to do that. I can't buy the argument – or at least I disagree, Bettie – that it would significantly change the number of days, particularly in the spring session.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. This isn't the only factor. This isn't the only variable – there's no question – but it is one of them. Curiously, the wish to end the session: that sense does not exist in the opposition ranks as it does on the government side of the House. Just for your information.

I'm interested, too, in two other comments. The Minister of Education says that it's working. Yes, we've had – what? – two years now with the committee structure and the subcommittees, and I think it is working reasonably well. I see no reason, if it's working, to change it. I think it has been a help. In fact, as I recall, Mr. Chairman, I think it was mostly our proposal that we go into a subcommittee structure, and I think last year's improvements were a help as well. So if it's working, I don't want to change it.

6:45

The other comment is that we run out of time, and we do run out of time as it is. We run out of time, and what we're saying here is that we're going to compress this even further. Somehow or other I can't do that.

I don't want to downgrade in any way the importance of legislation dealing with the laws that are presented to us. I agree absolutely: that is the most significant part. But in addition to that, the budget is the one time and it's the one document that opposition members and the public at large feel very strongly about. It is the harbinger. It's the three-year plans. It's the time when we see it laid out, not just this year but next year and the year after, and see what happened last year and have the chance to look at that and to question our front bench. Mr. Chairman, there's no way that I think it's appropriate to reduce that potential for all members of the House.

I appreciate the work that's gone into this, but I don't think this is the right time to do it. I don't agree with shortening the time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just a comment, if I may, on information you gave us as information about opposition members not wanting to get out of the House. As Government House Leader I can assure you that after about three weeks into any session I am besieged as strongly by opposition members as by anybody else in terms of the question, "When are we getting out of here?"

MRS. HEWES: I'll speak to them, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: If you could do that for me, it would take some of the pressure off me.

Well, we've heard some interesting discussion, obviously some concerns about session, and I think it's been a focus on the length of session and what it may do to it. I appreciate those comments. We do want, in looking at it, to actively encourage you to think and bring anything forward about the proposal itself.

Notwithstanding the concerns that we've heard, are there any logistical items you think we're missing? We won't presume any comments you have on the process we're putting forward here as being supporting of it, but with the fact that it does appear that this is going to move ahead, do you have any thoughts, comments, or questions on the logistics that could make it a better process?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, let me just kind of direct this question to you. What would be wrong with going with the first portion of this proposed change, but under reporting where it says three departments on day 8, for example, just have one on day 8, one on day 9. That's to allow those who have been at the other committees, committees A and D, to participate when it's before the entire House. With three in one evening, particularly a department like Education, advanced education, or social services, what opportunity would there be? There would be virtually none. So what's wrong with breaking that down even further and doing it, at least at this stage, then see how that works? Then from there we can maybe fine-tune it.

THE CHAIRMAN: If you recall, Percy, right now there are five that report in one night, not even three. So there's never been a consideration, certainly from the opposition or from government, that in the reporting-back procedure of the existing five designated subcommittees which exist now, you would want to take one evening for each reporting back. We actually do five, and the schedule we're proposing here is actually reducing that, making it only three. Certainly for one of those three departments, if opposition members felt that it should have more than a certain period of time, they could take more of the time on that evening, but that would be the evening deemed as those three departments having reported. It would be elastic. I think we would lose any efficiencies in time and, as Roy said, time that then could be focused on legislation without unnecessarily wearying members by having drawn out the whole process. So I would, you know, respectfully submit that then to go to one per night for reporting would defeat the purpose.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, maybe the wrong terminology is used there in terms of reporting. Maybe there should be further debate before the entire House and then report at the conclusion of that evening to allow those members who haven't been given the opportunity to participate to participate.

MRS. HEWES: That's what we do now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

Being totally frank about estimate nights now, obviously it's incumbent upon the government to make sure there's a quorum in the House at all times. So there are a certain number of government members that are there significantly. There are nights when there are very few opposition members. I'm not saying it's just opposition members not there; there are also government members not there. So our sense is clearly that there's ample opportunity to take part.

I have trouble fathoming a situation where one member would feel that they've been deprived of an opportunity when all members can attend. I know you're thinking, Percy, that there might be a night you're on duty in your Environmental Protection one and in the other room is Energy. I've rarely seen a night where any member, either government or opposition, has stayed in for the entire debate of one particular estimate. I don't know that I've ever witnessed that happening, as a matter of fact. So the chances of a member losing out and not being able to attend would be, I think, so minimal as to be negligible, in my view.

MR. BRASSARD: I do believe, Mr. Chairman, given the smaller group, as Bonnie has pointed out earlier, that it will give an opportunity for a more in-depth discussion about a committee. So the reporting of those committees to the full Assembly then will be an addendum to that, if you will. Every member has an opportunity to review *Hansard*, what had been said. Any question still hanging out there by any individual members can be addressed in the Assembly in a given period of time. And I think it's quite feasible to address three departments in one evening if everyone sticks to the relevance of the concerns as opposed to rambling on about nothing, which often happens when we get into discussing some of these estimates.

I think the process has an awful lot of merits. I really think it should be tried. If there are weaknesses that show up, then perhaps address them later on, but I think there's a lot of merit. I think we can discuss in full detail the estimate and then pick up the random remaining concerns, if you will, that people have when it's reported to the Assembly. So I think this is actually an asset or an addition to the procedure we've got now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just to clarify what you said when you said three departments reporting in one evening. You're talking about the reporting process after they've already had one individual night themselves, just that department.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, that's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, can we know what the government's intent is in this regard – you spoke about logistics – what your intention is to do with this proposal? How is this coming to the House and so on? When, timing?

THE CHAIRMAN: Again, we're just trying to work out any fine details that may be missed, but when you look at Standing Orders, especially in 56 and 57, they already accommodate what we're talking about. Standing Order 57 is quite clear that the Committee of Supply

may establish subcommittees, in addition to the Designated Supply Subcommittees, consisting of members . . . and, with respect to each subcommittee so established, shall designate its name, appoint its members and designate its chairman and deputy chairman.

Et cetera. So the rules are there, and we would simply move

along with Standing Orders as the budget comes down and we begin the process of Committee of Supply. We'll use the existing Standing Orders and so move in that direction.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, just to be clear, then, it is your intent simply to do it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Correct.

MRS. HEWES: I mean, this is no longer a proposal; this is a fait accompli. Is that what I'm looking at? I just want to know, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. I think I've been clear about it right from the start that we'd planned to move in this direction barring something totally unforeseen legally, which I don't see because other Legislatures and indeed the federal House do this. The discussion has been detailed and active for over a year. The proposal has been before both caucuses for over a year, and it's a very clear process of streamlining yet not limiting or shortening by one minute the debate on the estimates. So we just see it as ongoing efficiency and, at the same time, simultaneously enhancing debate. And, yes, it is our intention that we would move ahead with this.

6:55

MRS. HEWES: Just one last question then. This ends here. There is no opportunity for any debate further on this proposal. We're through tonight, if I read you right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, yeah. Basically that's right, other than if there were things . . .

MRS. HEWES: I just want to be clear.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. If there were things that we haven't discussed tonight, if tomorrow you think of something, next week you think of something that could make this better or something we haven't considered that we need to make sure is accommodated – it might be something logistical. It might be a question that we haven't thought of. I mean, we want the channels open on the process being perfected.

MRS. HEWES: But this is not being debated by the Legislature.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. The present Standing Orders accommodate this.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you.

MR. FRIEDEL: Mr. Chairman, getting back to addressing Percy's concern about any member wanting the opportunity to speak at different committees, I don't see anything in this that would preclude a member from attending part of either one of the committee sessions that would be held on a given evening, being as we are an entire two floors apart. It wouldn't be difficult or impossible to do that, to speak at the committee of your choice and then move to another one, being not much different than indeed happens now when members come and go in the Assembly on nights that the debate presently exists. Is that correct?

THE CHAIRMAN: That's correct.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'm having a little trouble following you saying that this is fait accompli. I don't think you can bypass the

Legislature on changing the orders unless the Legislature has passed something saying that you have the right to change this particular order, in other words. I don't think there's been anything passed by the Legislature on that. I think you have to go back to them. Even the Speaker expects things to come back for debate. I just question it. I don't have my little green book, but I know in the past the Legislature has given the committee the right to change something, which is fine then, but I don't believe the Legislature gives us the right to change. I think we have to report back to the Legislature for concurrence on their report, and then at that time all this comes up for debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. If I can clarify for you, the present Standing Orders, as we see them, accommodate this. There is no change of Standing Orders. However, when we start the Committee of Supply, it still requires a motion, which can be debated. Absolutely.

MR. N. TAYLOR: A motion to follow this pattern?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. You know, the motion will be: we are now going to move and do thus and so. That is the debatable one.

MR. N. TAYLOR: For so many days, you mean, in the motion?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. The whole process of setting up the designated supply committees and designating them, et cetera. That is a debatable motion, and then full debate can take place on that very motion. So this is not leaping over debate on this in the House. In that debate, should there be one – and I can hear there's a slim chance there may be one.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I still think the proper procedure is to seek concurrence of the House to our report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Which we will be, in that motion.

MR. N. TAYLOR: You're going to incorporate that in with that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. As a parliamentary reform committee, you know, we wanted to meet to discuss this, recognizing – let's be honest – that this still did not have the approval of the Liberal caucus for reasons which obviously the majority of this table disagrees with. Since it's been before your caucus for a year, I wanted to hear the concerns and also if there are some ways, some things that you'd like us to consider as a group and then build that into the process. If there is nothing further on that, then we'll have to wait for the actual full debate in the Assembly with all members there when the motion comes forward. But this is a discussion here in the committee to pool a collective number of I think significant brains and see if there are things logistically or procedurally that we're missing here. So this does come to the Assembly for debate, because the motion has to come forward. As we send out a report to all members of this meeting – obviously we send the *Hansard* out – it will be clear to people that there is not unanimity around the table on this approach. It will be debated in the Assembly when that motion comes forward in Committee of Supply.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, it still comes to the Assembly in the form of a motion even though it's already established in Standing Orders?

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, yeah. We still have to move to do such

and such at a given time and a given place. That's in Committee of Supply.

Dr. McNeil.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, Mr. Chairman, just to clarify that. The Standing Order says that "the Committee of Supply may establish subcommittees." So there would be a motion in the Committee of Supply to establish the subcommittees. As the Standing Order says, members of the subcommittee "shall designate its name, appoint its members and designate its chairman and deputy chairman." So that's what the motion would do. And that's a debatable motion in Committee of Supply.

THE CHAIRMAN: Correct. Thank you, David.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, through you maybe I could direct a question to the Clerk. Dr. McNeil, the Standing Orders, if I recall correctly, now allow for a maximum of 20 days of debate on the estimates. That's always been a courtesy, at least in the past, that all parties in the House agreed to those particular days of estimates. Are you saying that part of this proposal would be to shorten this down to - what is it? - 12 days, whatever? Even though we as opposition may object to losing those eight days of budgetary debate, we would lose them?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I stand to be corrected, but Standing Order 58(1) says that it "shall be called to consider the main estimates on not more than 20 sitting days."

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah, not more than 20. But in the past it's always been a custom that there has been agreement that if the opposition has said, "We want the full 20 days," government has said, "Fine."

DR. McNEIL: But there's also another Standing Order, 58(3), that says:

Any day that a subcommittee, other than a Designated Supply Subcommittee, of the Committee of Supply sits constitutes a sitting day for the purposes of this order.

So if on the first day, say, hypothetically a motion to go into subcommittee is passed and two subcommittees meet on day one, that counts for two days towards that 20. If you have 17 departments and take five away from that because of the DSS - there are five days for DSS - then there are 12. So if you meet six days, two committees each day, you've done 12 days of that 20 days. Then you have eight days left, in effect, to report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you follow that, Percy? The Standing Order is clear.

Any day that a subcommittee, other than a Designated Supply Subcommittee, of the Committee of Supply sits constitutes a sitting day for the purposes of this order.

Those are agreed-on Standing Orders, agreed on by all members of the House.

MR. WICKMAN: I guess the bottom line, Mr. Chairman, really is quite frankly that the parliamentary system is such that the majority can do what they want to do if they want to do it by legislation, if they want to do it by existing Standing Orders, whatever. There is some common courtesy involved sometimes, but if government wants to ram something through on us or ram something through on Albertans, we're sort of powerless to stop it unless we can convince, I guess, the public at large that it's not to their benefit to see these types of changes done. I kind of prefer a system myself where there is, you know, some debate

and some input and where it's done on a more co-operative basis rather than just ramming the thing through. Give it more time; something can be worked out.

THE CHAIRMAN: I guess I have to, you know, obviously take some issue with the ramming through. I presented this to the opposition through their House leader over a year ago, and these are Standing Orders that have already been agreed on. I appreciate some of what I've heard in terms of the discussion, but there's no ramming through here. It was discussed again last fall with the Opposition House Leader and other members, yet with nothing substantive in terms of procedure. There was a recognition that, yes, this will enhance debate, yes, it will be more focused, yes, the scrutiny will be more intense.

The number of sitting days itself, as defined by Standing Orders, isn't reduced. As Gary said, there's no clear guarantee that it's going to reduce the length of the session. The length of the session is dependent on the amount of legislation. I think it was Roy who said that this certainly allows more calendar days of time to look intensely at legislation before that somewhat undefinable line comes at which all members, as indicated earlier, are starting to get fed up with the length of the session. So, you know, on all those points I think there have been some remarks made.

7:05

MR. WICKMAN: It depends to the degree, Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, as to how much patience the government has in terms of debating legislation when we come to the actual Bills. There has been the odd occasion where closure has been used to sort of shorten the process somewhat. So it doesn't always work exactly as cozy as you might suggest.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think government has been known for its patience in session, and there have been occasions when closure has been used when the amount of debating hours starts to hit record proportions. I'm sure there'll be opportunities, even as the Prime Minister demonstrated with regional vetoes, a very short period of time to ram through something as significant as altering the Constitution. It was felt, I would think, by the Prime Minister, as he said, that the debate had been out there, that discussion had been long, and that it was time to do something. So use of closure is not something restricted certainly to this government.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, in fairness to my colleagues who are absent, I think when we talked about 20 days as opposed to 25, I certainly didn't think about them as compressed days. I thought of them as subsequent days. I think they would have thought the same thing now, but clearly the Standing Orders allow for the other interpretation. I have to accept that. I simply didn't look at those logistics clearly enough at the time or I would have picked that up and seen what has now been anticipated here.

Help me here, Mr. Chairman. Does this Special Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform have a slot when we report to the Assembly? I can't recall that.

THE CHAIRMAN: We would have that opportunity if we felt there was some report that had to go to the Assembly. As was identified in some of the items you mentioned and that Percy did at the start, if there are some kinds of changes from Standing Orders or a way in which we want to get around Standing Orders, the Speaker has communicated an agreement. So, as you know, there have been a number of times where even though Standing



Orders say something, we as members have said: notwithstanding that. But it usually hasn't resulted from a report of this committee to the Assembly. It's gone through the Speaker.

MRS. HEWES: Now, the reason I'm asking is if this committee does make a formal report, submit this formal report to the Legislative Assembly, then that is another opportunity for debate on this particular item.

THE CHAIRMAN: It would be if it was the decision of this committee to do so.

MRS. HEWES: Can I ask if you're going to do that?

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't anticipate doing that, no. Certainly the results of this meeting tonight will be distributed to all members through *Hansard* and through minutes. When Standing Orders already accommodate the direction we're going, I don't know why there would be a report of this select special committee.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I submit, if I can continue, that I consider it a substantive change. You've pointed out to us that it's within the Standing Orders mandate, and I accept that, but it is a substantive change in how we will be conducting ourselves, and it will make a difference to the opposition. I would hope that you might discuss this with the Speaker as to whether or not it should constitute a report of the committee, which would give the Legislature an opportunity to look at it.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I have to take issue with the reference to this being a substantive change from one perspective, and that is, as I mentioned earlier this evening, that this move to a more focused type of budget debate was supported by some members of government and certainly, as I understand it, by a majority of the members of the opposition party, or parties at one time.

So I have difficulty with letting this be recorded as a substantial change in direction. We launched out in a particular direction with the establishment of budget subcommittee examination as it currently exists, and this is a further focusing of that process. So I just think it should be made clear that this is not something that goes dramatically in a new direction or in opposition to either the expressed views of government members or of those of the opposition. It's an item with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think too, as a point of information, that when you compare estimate times of other Legislatures, I don't know that we spend the most time, but we are certainly near the top in terms of debate time, as I understand it. That's something that could be researched.

MR. FRIEDEL: The concern was expressed by Bettie that there should be an additional opportunity, I guess it would have to be called, to debate this in the House. We just discussed a few minutes ago, I gather, that when a motion is made to establish the subcommittees and then to adjourn to them, that was a debatable motion. So that opportunity would exist. If the purpose, without beating around the bush, is to voice objection to the change, that could be done at that time.

Certainly the *Hansard* record of this evening would establish I think quite adequately that you're less than enthralled by this move. Would we not be accomplishing that through either this purpose and through that opportunity to debate the motion in the House?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, debating the motion in the House, yes, obviously would give time for all members to express either their pleasure or their displeasure with having two subcommittees sit on one night. As the bottom line, that's exactly what we're talking about: two subcommittees sitting one night instead of one committee sitting one night. Yes, there would be debate on that very point, and members would have ample opportunity to express their displeasure or pleasure.

MRS. HEWES: Just to clarify that. The only difference, as I see it, Gary, is that this has been an ongoing discussion from this committee itself and so would come forward as a report of this committee as opposed to simply a motion at the time that we go into Committee of Supply. Maybe that is not of significance, but I see it as being different.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Well, I'm having a little trouble. It would seem to me that we have two issues here. One is the goodness, if you want to call it that, or the evilness of the fewer days, and the other one is your statement that this committee has a right to writing the laws without a debate or without request from the House. If that's the case, if I'm following your line of reasoning, there's no need for it to be on the agenda. Because you've got the majority, you just would have got it through anyhow.

It seems to me you have to ask for concurrence of the House on something as major as this, I think. It's not just a housekeeping affair. Otherwise you wouldn't have brought it up on the agenda. It is a change in handling things. You may be right. On the other hand, I just joined this committee. Percy and Bettie may be right that it's certainly cutting the chance for the public to get a look at what the government is doing. We always worry about cabinet secrecy, and this seems to be playing into the hands of cabinet secrecy. If I heard you right – I hope I didn't; I've got my hearing aid in. Quite often I've been known to turn it off, hon. member, when the government's speaking, but this time I have it on – you said that you have the right to change these laws, the right to change this particular Standing Order without the House being in on it, that you can go ahead and put it into force, and it won't be coming up for debate in the House as to whether or not we'll shorten it.

7:15

THE CHAIRMAN: No. I tried to clarify that for you last time, hon. member.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I missed it.

THE CHAIRMAN: First of all, there is no change of laws; there is no change of Standing Orders. It does have to be debated; we do have to have concurrence in the House. There does have to be a motion and there will be a motion on this. The House has to concur. There will be debate. There is no change in law, no change in Standing Orders. So there will be debate on this.

DR. McNEIL: I think it's important to be aware that the ability for the Committee of Supply to move into subcommittees has been in place since at least 1972 or 1973. The Committee of Supply did in fact do that for a period of about six years between 1973 and 1979. The only change that's been made in the Standing Orders since that time which would relate to this was that from '73 to '79 there was no limit on the number of supply days. Subsequently there was a limit put in, in 1982, of 25 days, and that's been moved to 20. Those subcommittees of supply were always considered as days for the purposes of counting days, at



least after 1982 when they put in that Standing Order limiting the number of days. So historically it's something that has been done in the past.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Actually, they were done every year from 1972 to 1979, starting off with four subcommittees the first couple of years and then decreasing to two subcommittees all the way till 1979. That was the last time subcommittees were used in Committee of Supply.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wasn't part of the reason – I could be wrong. How many opposition members were there in '79?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I think there were six in 1979.

THE CHAIRMAN: Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Thank you. I just want to respond to Nick's comment about how this would enable more secrecy on the part of cabinet or the government. I find that in the designated supply subcommittee we don't have these rambling debates. It's very pointed. The questions are asked, and they are answered. I feel that that's a much cleaner process and a much better process for getting information out. So I think the subcommittee is going to be a much better vehicle. The press will be there. It's open. You still have your opportunity to ask the questions that you feel are appropriate or that you feel are very important.

Also, if you're in one committee and you have a particular interest in another one, you certainly could pass your questions on to your colleague, who can ask those questions for you. With *Hansard* being there, the replies are there for you to read.

I think it'll be more pointed, more directed, and it will certainly be a better vehicle. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Bonnie.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I recall Minister Bogle at the time speaking as to why those committees had been discontinued. He made a very compelling argument that in fact it had all been debated all over again when they were reported. I think that was a good argument, and they were discontinued partly for that reason. I think we're way past that. I think there's been good co-operation. The subcommittees, where there's fuller opportunity for people to have a less formal discussion, have worked pretty well.

Back to my original point. All members of the opposition want to have the opportunity for every department, and this limits that. I know we say, yes, you could run back and forth between meetings, but we know that really doesn't quite work that way. That's my plea here. It's simply to accommodate that need for members of the opposition, however.

THE CHAIRMAN: I appreciate that comment. Can you help me? Not having attended as a member at a designated supply subcommittee meeting, what's the average number of extra Liberals who attend those that aren't named on the committee? On average, how many would there be extra?

MRS. HEWES: I'm sorry; I don't have an answer for you.

MR. N. TAYLOR: About one every three meetings maybe or four meetings.

THE CHAIRMAN: Every three or four there would be an extra person there?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We can all look at attendance. I do record attendance at given times, and there are many nights in estimates when there are three Liberals, four Liberals there. I don't think any would say that they're being denied opportunity when there's a designated supply subcommittee. I certainly haven't heard from our members that they feel they're being denied an opportunity because of other meetings that they have to attend. That, though, is what I would say is a logistical concern we will have to watch. With any of these that are being raised, I think it's fair to say that if the process is found to be profoundly unworkable and not as efficient as we think it will be, then obviously it would be reconsidered.

MR. WICKMAN: Another question dealing with the logistics, the committee membership consisting of 20 members: 12 government and eight opposition. Now, I'm asking, I guess, in the process as to what happens first. Prior to the estimates beginning, there is normally a motion calling for, you know, so many days and so on and so forth. At what particular point is government going to request the opposition to start naming their members? You can't very well do it before that motion is approved in the House.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, actually, correspondence between the House leaders shows that it's a regular occurrence for the Government House Leader to request of the opposition which members they want on which committees. That just happens as a matter of course, and I would hope people would see that as a basic efficiency that's afforded to both parties.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm just asking: at what stage in the process would it be your intention to bring forward the motion dealing with the estimates?

THE CHAIRMAN: Once we move into Committee of Supply. It would be following the budget. At some point following the budget is when we move into Committee of Supply. Certainly I understand the concerns and that there's not a wish to go ahead on this because there's some sense that it may limit debate time. Not on estimates. I think we're all agreed that this won't limit debate on estimates, but you feel it would limit debate elsewhere. Notwithstanding that, I would hope that we would continue to be able to work co-operatively to draw up the schedule. People would know well ahead of time where they're going to be, what nights, what committees. Certainly, you know, I'll be striving to that end, to make it as convenient for everybody as possible, with both members and ministers having as much forenotice as possible. That motion would include the membership, obviously, but that's a basic thing that we've always done.

Gary. One more, he says.

MR. FRIEDEL: I know that these things, whether we do it here or whether we do it in the House, often appear to be debated on the basis of party lines. I guess it would be difficult to deny that often that is the case, but I would really like to emphasize that I'm personally supporting this on the basis that I think it's efficient, notwithstanding the debate we had about, you know, the extra number of days and everything. I guess we can play semantics with whether or not it's more important to debate the budget or potential legislation, and you know the games we can play if we want to use closure and all those other things. I think you know the arguments.

I feel very strongly, though, that when you sit in a small group

– and this is a prime example – we go around and around it, and it's a debate. It's not a measure of who can talk the longest and say the least. I find myself very reluctant to get into those kinds of debates. I'm not a very gifted public speaker. I have to be very deliberate about what I say, and I usually find that if I can't say it in five minutes or less, I either run out of important things to say or even question whether the things are important.

I want to really emphasize that that is the reason I'm supporting this, not because it could shorten days, because I truly question that it's going to make that significant a difference. I think we've established that it doesn't limit the opportunity. If you have an entire evening, I don't think there's anything extremely limiting about going from one room to the other. You could probably even do it a couple of times if it were necessary. But everybody does get the opportunity, and I think the questions are concise, the debate becomes concise, and hopefully the answers would reflect that too, because there's going to be more of them. I don't think we should short sell this idea on its positive merits.

7:25

MR. N. TAYLOR: This is just a mechanical question. I appreciate what Gary has said there, but if these committee meetings go on and there are two or three running at the same time . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Just two.

MR. N. TAYLOR: . . . two running at the same time, will one committee room stay open until the allotted time, or will it quit? In other words, if they run out of questions halfway through that meeting, will they take off? If you were sitting in the other room waiting for your chance to get in, and – now, bless his little pointed head, he's no longer a cabinet minister – a fellow like the Member for Barrhead-Westlock, who was a cabinet minister, went on and on and on, you'd be there until the Second Coming waiting to get your next question in, and you were hoping to get over to the next meeting. Then we've got a minister like the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, who answers everything in a hell of a hurry and tries to wind up in 20 minutes. Is there going to be some consolation, if you're in opposition, that you're sitting there questioning this cabinet minister but you know the other one is still going to be there just as long as you get there before that time? That gets to be kind of a frustrating exercise.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, as we already indicated earlier – and it was a suggestion last year of Bettie's that we communicate to cabinet ministers in the designated supply subcommittees that they limit their time. That was communicated, and they did. We will do the same on this. Right now there is no set time. As you know, in estimates we can go until 10 o'clock or 10:30 or 11 or a quarter to 12. There will be no set time. As I think Bonnie mentioned, I think what members are going to find is that they have even a greater opportunity to get on the list just due to the whole way we're going about this process. It hasn't been a problem in designated supply committees. It'll be one of the things we'll watch for, though, for sure.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Most opposition members have two portfolios to watch over. So if you've got two different portfolios and they come up the same night, you're going to be a little bit like the proverbial cat on the tin roof. It's not going to be too easy. That's why I'd like to make sure that we knew that if the House sitting started at 8, at least they'd be there until 9:30 or 10 regardless of whether there were any questions there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, that's why the co-operation in setting up the committees. Obviously I want to work with the Opposition House Leader. You know who's on what committees. We virtually want to hand you the calendar and, as far as possible, accommodate that. So that should be not happening at all, or if it does, we'll look for a way to try and accommodate it.

MR. N. TAYLOR: The other question. The Member for Peace River quite honestly and sincerely puts forward that he only wants to say something for a few minutes, but I've noticed in committees that when you're after a cabinet minister, immediately the hounds all come out on the government side and everybody makes sure they get a question, so you can only come back maybe a second time. They make sure that the space has moved up so that you in debate – I don't blame them. I mean, politicians are like musk ox; when you get one wounded, they all gather around and keep their horns down. When we've got a cabinet minister on the run, you're not going to let us get at him. You're going to have a whole pile of people in there asking questions.

So this idea that you're going to get more questions I think is a thought that maybe comes out of heaven, but it's going to have to be a live-and-learn thing. We're not going to get more questions if we really want questions, because if a cabinet minister is in trouble and we want to ask questions, the government has the facilities to surround him with all kinds of puffballs to make sure that we only get in about two for the whole evening.

THE CHAIRMAN: I can tell you, hon. member, that . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: That would never happen, of course.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. The *Hansard* record going back for years, certainly the years I've been here and the years you've been here, will clearly show, when you look at it, that debate in estimates is predominantly dominated, if I can be redundant, by opposition members.

MRS. HEWES: As it should be.

THE CHAIRMAN: As it should be.

As a cabinet minister I have never had this experience of my own members gathering around me to protect me. I haven't had that yet.

MRS. LAING: They've usually helped.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MRS. HEWES: You haven't needed it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know about that.

MR. N. TAYLOR: It's the opposition that has to be protected when you get up there.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll ignore that last comment.

MR. FRIEDEL: I think oftentimes we like to see him get beat up as badly as you do.

Seriously – and I'm not sure what the logistics of this are – if you want to get in more questions, something that I've been the proponent of for a long time is: why not debate the question time to about five minutes, and then you're going to get four times as many questions. That would suit me fine, considering my earlier

remarks that I find I run out of intelligent things to say after the first one or two minutes. I'm not sure how you'd change that.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Obviously an amateur. He's worried about saying intelligent things.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I should ask the Member for Redwater: were you proposing that we limit the amount of time each time a member stands up that he could debate? Is that what you're suggesting?

MR. N. TAYLOR: No. I was just commenting about the question of having a couple going at the same time. It's going to be frustrating sitting in one place waiting for your turn, wondering whether the cabinet minister's even going to be there in the other room when you get back. That would apply to you too. If you want to ask somebody a question and the other one a question, you don't know where you are on the order and you don't know if the cabinet minister's still going to be there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I know the chair is certainly flexible on order. Again, as I said, *Hansard* will show that government members consistently defer to opposition members, especially in estimates. You can see that with the time registered in *Hansard*.

MR. FRIEDEL: Again I'm going to have to go back and suggest that more time is expended asking questions, I think generally, than giving answers. I think we do this when the time runs short: if the respective minister hasn't had any opportunity to address all the questions, they often do it in writing following. I don't think we would be precluding any of those options; would we?

THE CHAIRMAN: No. Nothing changes in terms of the estimates procedures.

MRS. HEWES: I have to say as well, in response to Gary, that I have found ministers very co-operative. Inevitably I ask more questions than there is time for answers, and I've found them very co-operative in getting me the answers and very promptly as well. I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Seeing no further clamouring for input, we will give full consideration to the concerns that have been addressed.

Just to quickly summarize then. A report, obviously, of this meeting goes out. I will discuss it with the Speaker, as requested by Mrs. Hewes. There's no change in laws here, no change in Standing Orders. The only change would be two subcommittees deliberating at the same time and then having to report back to the full committee, which would actually add additional time again. There will be a motion on this item in the House. It will have to have concurrence of the House and will have full debate.

I do encourage all members, if there are other things that come across your mind or if there are some things that you think we've missed, to please get back to me or through your House leader to me in the days before we move into the House sometime before February 15. I won't interpret your suggestions on perfecting this process as supportive of it. It will just be things that may come up that you think have to be considered.

Unless there's any other item of business, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I just have a suggestion on this scheduling, that's still bothering me. Maybe the way you could handle it is

you could go to two systems. You're the House leader and you make a proposal, but the Opposition House Leader would be the one that would say which cabinet ministers are sitting. In other words, you'd have sort of a two-key approach. Then the opposition couldn't complain that the government was intentionally stacking two things at the same time.

THE CHAIRMAN: I said earlier and I was sincere that we virtually want to hand to you the calendar and say: what days work best for you? Then we would honestly work to accommodate that.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, is it your intention now that we've considered the proposal to call the question here in this committee so that it would be recorded whether the committee is in support or opposed, just for the record, the minutes?

THE CHAIRMAN: As the chairman I'm not putting forward a motion, if that's what you're asking.

7:35

MRS. HEWES: All right. I'm asking that. Is anyone else going to do it?

THE CHAIRMAN: I can't read everyone's mind.

MRS. HEWES: Well, then perhaps I can move that the subcommittee structure and the estimate days stay the same, just to get the thing on the table so that our discussion is somehow concluded in this committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Just to clarify now so that your motion's clear. As I said, we're not changing Standing Orders and what's there. You would like it clear that there be no change in the present?

MRS. HEWES: That's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. That's your motion.

MR. BRASSARD: Just for clarification, Mr. Chairman. Should not this motion take place within the Assembly? Isn't that the purpose?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. I don't think this committee can make that decision. That's a fair point.

MR. BRASSARD: I think that the motion is out of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm going to take, as I always do, guidance from the members. We don't have the ability here, which is why I said to Nick Taylor that this has to come into the Assembly in terms of the decision.

MR. BRASSARD: Just further to my comments. I think that the motion would be in order if we were going to change something and we were going to recommend a change, but basically we're going to go into the Assembly and ask to implement a change that is already available to us in the Standing Orders. It's an implementation as opposed to a change, and we're going to raise that motion in the Assembly, so I don't think that there's a motion called for.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I'm just asking if it's not important that there be some record of this committee's support

or nonsupport of the proposal as it has been outlined. If it's your determination that is not to happen, then fine. I'm just trying to get something on the table for us here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, just as a matter of administrative record would you be comfortable – I mean, even as I speak this is recorded in *Hansard* – that as the chairman I recognize that Bettie Hewes, Nick Taylor, and Percy Wickman are not in favour of moving in this direction?

MRS. HEWES: As the proposal is outlined, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let that be so recorded.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, there's another way of doing it. That would simply be that it be moved that this committee not endorse the proposed schedule of ministers' estimates as presented, and it would die right here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. JONSON: Well, you know, Mr. Chairman, procedural wrangles are wonderful things, but I think very early on in the meeting this afternoon, now evening, on this particular topic the

chairman made it clear that we were here to look at and comment on a proposal and that there would be in due course a motion in the Assembly, which would be debatable, to implement it. We as government members could certainly have come in here and laid a particular motion to endorse this on the table right off the bat, but it was clear that that was not the intent of the meeting. We've had our discussion this evening. The chairman has indicated that your opposition as members of the opposition will be recorded, and as indicated right up front at the beginning of the meeting there will be a motion in the Assembly to be dealing with this.

MRS. HEWES: I'm satisfied.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Well, then, having had that duly recorded and the consenting members, was that a motion to adjourn?

MR. BRASSARD: It was.

THE CHAIRMAN: All in favour? Thank you very much, folks. We will continue the communication here.

[The committee adjourned at 7:39 p.m.]