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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 7 May 2008

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 7 mai 2008

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Use of technology

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Utilisation de la technologie

Chair: Bas Balkissoon
Clerk: Tonia Grannum

Président : Bas Balkissoon
Greffière : Tonia Grannum

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 7 May 2008

Mercredi 7 mai 2008

The committee met at 1306 in room 228.

BRIEFING

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I call the meeting of the Legislative Assembly committee to order.

In the interests of the committee, the Speaker is here, as a courtesy, to give us a quick outline on the role between the committee and the Speaker. I would like to deal with the Speaker first. Is that okay with everybody?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Steve?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee.

First, I'd like to introduce Maggie Head, my executive assistant. If any of you have any issues at any time, please don't hesitate to contact Maggie in room 180, 5-7435.

There are a couple of issues I just wanted to broach. One was the issue of the parliamentary channel. I know that there has been discussion amongst all three caucuses on Web-streaming the proceedings. Depending on what satellite provider you have, or in some parts of the province, you don't necessarily have access to the parliamentary channel. There seems to be a general consensus amongst all three parties to proceed with Web streaming. I just wanted to let the committee be aware that I will be taking a resolution to the Board of Internal Economy to see if they're prepared to fund this. It would have an annual cost of about \$50,000. Those are dollars that are not budgeted for, and certainly, if this is a priority, those dollars would have to be found by the government. But there does seem to be a consensus for that.

I should just back up for a moment—and former Speaker Brown certainly can relate to this too. The parliamentary channel does fall under the purview of the Speaker. There are very clear and strict rules regarding the parliamentary channel that are set out by the CRTC as to what can and cannot be placed on that channel. The general rule is that anything that in any way may be perceived to be of a political nature cannot go on that channel. As an example, if somebody wanted to advocate for Foodland Ontario commercials, Foodland Ontario commercials would not be eligible. Getting-a-flu-shot commercials would not be eligible under the CRTC rules. It is strictly to broadcast the proceedings of the Parlia-

ment. The only exception granted has been for election time, because that is something that is viewed as non-partisan.

I was in Quebec City at a Speakers' conference in January, and the Quebec National Assembly has a very interesting thing that they do with their parliamentary channel—which is allowed—and that is profiles of all the members in a non-partisan way. I shared copies of some work that broadcast services had prepared and I'll pass this around. I know it was discussed in at least two caucuses—I'm hoping at others. This is strictly general information about each member in the Legislature. You'll notice, as you look through it, that it's bilingual. There are no colours identifiable with the parties. What it does is provide information about each of the members. It provides contact information as to what role they play either as a minister or as a critic. As well, it provides for their constituency addresses, their Toronto addresses. The one other aspect of it is a small, approximately 30-second-video clip of the member in the chamber, but there is no sound associated with it. This is allowed and can be added to the parliamentary channel at virtually no cost because it's all work that can be done in-house.

I'm here today to seek support, certainly, or at least put the subject on the table and ask for the committee's consideration. Whether that is today, or you may want to deliberate and report back to me down the road, but just to put it on the table that I would appreciate the consideration of the committee of this initiative to find out whether there is the support to proceed with it.

I have one other subject that I'd like to raise as well, but I'll just leave this one for now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions or comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Forgive me; I actually don't own a TV, so I'm going to ask some questions. What does the Legislative Assembly show during an election period and during the summer and winter recesses currently?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): During the summer recess, if you were to watch—for Hansard's sake, I'm looking at the television screen that is behind me over my left shoulder, and what you see on that television screen right now—different views of Queen's Park; views of the provincial flag—is what you would see with some background music, generally classical music. That is what is on when the House is not sitting.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: And again, currently, when we are in session, I know that the debates get repeated. How often does that occur? What is the repeat cycle?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It is at least once. Generally, what happens is the repeat begins at either 6:15 or 6:30 and the whole session is shown again.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's in the evening too, like overnight?

Sorry. So it would be repeated just once.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So once live and once repeated.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Correct.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: There's also a Sunday.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, former Speaker Brown.

There is also a Sunday encore. It's like a synopsis of the week. The broadcast services, I think, will do some editing and provide a kind of synopsis of what took place over the past week.

Mr. Norm Miller: I was just looking for clarification on what the committee's responsibility is for the television services, because I know the television service is one of the things that the committee is responsible for. So how does that work in terms of how we report to you or what the relationship is?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ultimately, it is the Speaker, on behalf of all the members, who would say yes or no to something going on the legislative channel. But the Speaker would not act unilaterally; hence why I circulated the proposal to the caucuses and I am now before you as a committee.

Mr. Norm Miller: What is the committee's responsibility, though? Maybe the clerk can clarify this. I know that a couple of years ago we toured the television service, and as far as I know, that's one of our responsibilities. What exactly is the job of the committee to do with television services? Is it the budget? Is it what they do?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It's to conduct reviews, at least on an annual basis, of the televising of the legislative proceedings and the guidelines established by the House with respect to the television broadcast system. In that capacity, you act as an advisory body to the Speaker. There are a set of guidelines that are in your standing orders binder.

Mr. Norm Miller: That helps. So, we can look at the television services and make recommendations, and the Speaker has the final say on our recommendations.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Just so I have a good understanding, are we bound by law to televise the proceedings?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't believe so, but it is a decision that has been made, I think, since television was introduced in the chamber in the mid-1980s. It has become the practice and the tradition of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Do we have any idea as to what the overall operating budget is for the current status of the televised proceedings?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't have that, but I can certainly provide that. It's my understanding that you may well be having the broadcast services coming in, at your next meeting, for a more fulsome discussion with your committee.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Some of the NBCs and the CBCs of the world do some sort of viewer sweeps to get some idea as to the number of people who are using their particular channels. Do we do anything like that with our channel?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): If I could defer to former Speaker Brown, he may be able to provide better clarification.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I can help there. You can subscribe to BBM, the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement. Private stations generally do it, and then they track the viewers. I'm confident that the Legislative Assembly does not subscribe to BBM.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I don't know that we do it all the time, but we have surveyed, through whatever means, the viewership of the channel. I cannot recall the numbers off the top of my head. But I know it has happened.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll ask the broadcast services to provide the committee with some additional information.

I can just tell you anecdotally that there are an amazing number of people who do watch it, who are what I would call armchair Speakers at home, who don't hesitate to either phone or e-mail the Speaker's office, providing advice as to how to deal with the members.

Mr. Bob Delaney: That gives rise to the obvious question: Are they giving the Speaker the thumbs-up or the thumbs-down?

I have two points. One is that I'd like to try out, after I'm finished here, some of the points you raised as a motion and see whether or not the committee would be willing to support it. Secondly, could we begin, in this fiscal year, a process of reviewing the actual broadcast technology, which is pretty much the same stuff that they put in nearly 25 years ago and is, in this day and age, archaic? In this current fiscal year, the notion of upgrading it would logically not be in the budget, nor should an upgrade be considered without looking at plans and options. Would it be realistic to ask the Speaker to work with broadcast services to talk about what we would like to have broadcast services look like in, say, the year 2012 and beyond? Perhaps we can set up an action plan to get there, beginning with a series of decisions that can be made in subsequent fiscal years.

1320

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I know that there is new lighting that is being installed in the chamber. In association with that new lighting, new cameras are being purchased. This is an issue that is under the consideration of the Board of Internal Economy.

I believe, as the clerk pointed out, that it's certainly within the purview of this committee to look at broadcast services. Certainly, I am prepared, as the Speaker, to

work with the committee and would be asking the broadcast services division within the Legislative Assembly to work with the committee to look at where we are and where we could possibly go.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Not wishing to get too far ahead of where we are now, but looking at the very obvious and clear trends in the hardware market in the consumer world, surely to God there isn't any reason why we would not, for example, install high-definition cameras if we're going to upgrade the current technology.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The technical point that you just raised is beyond me. I would certainly take it under advisement and ask that the broadcast services appear as a deputant before your committee, where you could ask those more technical questions.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mr. Chair, in the here and now, when we're done this round of comments, I'd like to propose a motion with regard to some of the short-term proposals that the Speaker has made.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can we do that when we deal with our subcommittee report?

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is actually with regard to proposals the Speaker has made to webcast the proceedings and to put profiles on the Web. I thought it might be helpful to have a motion from the committee on that. Shall I do it?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would say go ahead, but it would have been good, too, as part of the subcommittee report, number 4. We're going to do a review soon, so it would have been better to do a comprehensive job rather than one part now and another part later.

Mr. Norm Miller: Is it next week?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We didn't pick a date. Since we're doing a review of the whole broadcast system, I think if we do it all together and report once, that would be the best thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm very comfortable with that, as well. I just wanted to use this as an opportunity to put the initiative in front of the committee and would certainly allow you to follow your process.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It works for me.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There's one other item I would like to lay before the committee for its consideration, and I would certainly welcome some direction from the committee. Certainly, any role that each of you, as members, can play in assisting in general decorum within the House is always very much appreciated. An issue has arisen over the past couple of days, and when asked by the media, I said that I would be referring the matter to you. I'm honouring that commitment, and I will leave it in your hands to see what your recommendation is. The issue of coffee being served within the chamber has been raised by a member. Perhaps your legislative researcher may be able to provide some detail as to the history of how we got to serving just water within the chamber. My issue was—and this is why I think it's most appropriate that it be

dealt with by you: If it becomes coffee, are there other drinks that are going to be wanted to be served within that chamber? Then, beyond that, does it get into food? I will certainly look for some direction from your committee. Again, I'm not looking for an answer today, but it's an issue that I just felt was appropriate to put on the table, as it has been raised by an honourable member.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I was just walking into the chamber that morning when it happened. My understanding is that it was raised as a bit of a joke; it was a jest, I think. It was the first day of the new hours and somebody suggested that they might need a coffee. The Acting Chair, probably exercising some latitude, decided that he would entertain it seriously. Then the media seized upon it and it seemed to develop a life of its own. Any member I've talked to does not want coffee in the House. They are quite happy with the status quo. I think that if there was a way of dealing with this quickly, to just put an end to it, for all parties involved, that may be the best thing to do—in my opinion, anyway.

Mr. Norm Miller: I would support Mr. Flynn. We have coffee in the west and east lobbies, which is easily accessible for those who really want to have a coffee. We have water available in the Legislature. Personally, I think that's just fine. So I'm pleased to deal with this very quickly and would certainly support the status quo.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I spoke with the member who raised it, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, who said that he too was a little surprised at the way that it developed a life of its own. I very much agree with Mr. Flynn and Mr. Miller.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd say there's unanimity on this.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Have you got your answer, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. If any further questions arise, Mr. Chair, I'll gladly refer them to you.

If at any time, Mr. Chair, on any other issue, you would like me to appear before the committee, please don't hesitate. I look forward to working with you.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much for taking the time to be here.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll move to the agenda. The first item is the report of the subcommittee on committee business. If I could have Mr. Flynn read the report?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Your subcommittee met on Thursday, April 17, 2008, and agreed to the following:

(1) That a delegation of the Chair, one member from each caucus and two staff attend the 2008 annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures, subject to approval by the House.

(2) That the subcommittee be authorized to approve a committee budget for the delegation attending the NCSL annual meeting for submission to the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy for their approval.

(3) That the Chair write a letter advising the Ombudsman that the committee requests that he provide a briefing and answer questions on all reports of the Ombudsman as they become available.

(4) That the committee at a future meeting conduct a review of the television broadcast system as set out in its mandate.

I would move the adoption of that report.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Any discussion or comments? I have a motion by Mr. Flynn to adopt the report. All in favour? Agreed.

Now we have, as part of this report—the budget has been circulated. As I understand it, it just goes to the board.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Yes, if we approve it.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): This goes to the board for approval. We don't have to set aside the money; it's just a guideline of the approximate cost for the conference. So if you're okay with the budget as presented, I'd like to have a motion to adopt it.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): A motion by Mr. Rinaldi to adopt the budget as presented: All in favour? It carries.

Based on the subcommittee report, there's a request to review the broadcast system. Do we have the Ombudsman's report?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): I circulated the report on—I can't recall the issue, but it has been distributed.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I don't recall seeing it. Does anybody recall seeing it, the Ombudsman's report?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll send the letter off.

When would you like to deal with the broadcast system? Do you want me to call a meeting next week or the following week? Well, no, the following week is the break. The first week after the break?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The first week after the break.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Could we resolve the matter before the House rises in the spring?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would guess so, if we deal with it the first week after we return from the break. I can't see us deliberating a whole lot about it.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): So Wednesday the 28th? We'll invite staff from the broadcast system to present to us what it is they have and what they are doing. Then we'll take your motion, Mr. Delaney, and submit a report to the Speaker.

Anything else?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So on the Ombudsman's report, how are we proceeding with that? We'll get it redistributed?

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): First, I have to send the letter in number (3). He knows that he has to report to us, so when I hear from him we'll schedule it.

Do we have a motion to adjourn?

Interjections.

Mr. Norm Miller: On the agenda: Use of technology in the legislative precincts.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sorry.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Subsequent to the last meeting, the report from the House went to the Speaker. He's acting on it.

Mr. Norm Miller: Sure. I understood that, so I was surprised to see it on the agenda.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I think the agenda was printed beforehand. The latest that I understand from the Speaker's office is that we'll be able to use technology in here—the issue in the House is not resolved.

Mr. Norm Miller: The wi-fi, wireless.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Being available in the east and west lobbies?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It's in the process of being installed.

Mr. Bob Delaney: As a question of clarification, will that also include wi-fi in the committee rooms?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): My understanding was the lobbies, the dining room and the library.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's what I was told.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Can we clarify on committee rooms? Because it would make a lot of sense in committee rooms.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I will at least take that to discuss it with the Speaker.

Mr. Bob Delaney: That was part of the original recommendation back when the report was drafted, and its availability in committee rooms would be very helpful, not merely for members, but especially for some of the staff and people who come in during deputations.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That was a committee recommendation, so I'll have to find out where it goes from there.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): I'll just give you an update on the status of that previous report. The previous report from the Legislative Assembly committee was presented to the House, tabled in the House in the 38th Parliament. So therefore it was up to the House to act on those recommendations. The Parliament dissolved. We're in a new Parliament, so that report is procedurally dead. If you want to discuss further issues with respect to technology, you can bring them up as a brand new mandate in this committee.

The Chair (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): But I will definitely check with the Speaker's office as to what is being implemented and I'll let you know, Bob.

The committee adjourned at 1333.

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Research and Information Services