



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 1 June 2016

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 1^{er} juin 2016

**Standing Committee on
General Government**

Committee business

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
AFFAIRES GOUVERNEMENTALES**

Wednesday 1 June 2016

Mercredi 1^{er} juin 2016

The committee met at 1240 in committee room 2.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Good afternoon, members of the committee, legislative research, Clerk and representatives from Hansard. I'd like to welcome you all this afternoon. I'd like to call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on General Government, and we're here today to deal with the organization regarding Bill 201, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act and the Taxation Act, 2007.

I shall open it up to discussion. Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to thank particularly the official opposition for their collaboration on this important piece of legislation. I think we all agree it's really important. What I wanted to do was to bring forward a motion, Chair, for how we propose that we could potentially move forward on consultations on the bill.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Thank you very much. I'd just like to remind members of the committee that we are here on an order of the House, and we have lots of business to do over the next two weeks. Now the Clerk is handing—

Mr. Steve Clark: Two months.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Well, that too. The Clerk is handing out a proposal for the organization of the committee.

Mr. Baker, are you going to be reading that into the record?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Yes. Could I read that into the record?

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Yes. Whenever you're ready, sir.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Sure. I think copies are being handed around as we speak.

I move,

(1) That the committee meet the week of June 20, the week of July 11, the week of July 25 and the week of August 8 for the purpose of holding public hearings throughout Ontario; and

(2) The committee selects the following communities in which it may hold public hearings throughout the province: Ottawa, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Oshawa, Windsor-Essex, Kingston, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sarnia, Niagara Falls, Cornwall, Parry Sound, Owen Sound, Newmarket and Renfrew.

(3) That on each day of public hearings, the committee shall sit from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. and from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

(4) That the deadline for requests to appear be the Monday before a given week of public hearings begins; and

(5) That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to give notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

(6) That requests be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis; and

(7) That each individual presenter receive up to 10 minutes for their presentation, followed by 10 minutes of discussion with the presenter, moderated by the Chair; and

(8) That each organization or group of presenters receive up to 15 minutes for their presentation followed by 20 minutes of discussion with the presenters, moderated by the Chair; and

(9) That in the event of oversubscription to the public hearings for a given day, the subcommittee may determine whether to extend the sitting of the committee to 9 p.m. that day; and

(10) That the Clerk of the Committee meet with the subcommittee to organize the itinerary of public hearings based on the dates and locations above.

That's the motion, Chair. Then, if I may, I just wanted to add, if I could, some context to the motion. As I said at the outset, I think we probably all agree that this is a really important piece of legislation, and it's important to ensuring public confidence in our democratic system. That's why we thought it was important to bring the bill to committee immediately after first reading.

I want to emphasize that this motion is just really a proposal. We're of course open to whatever the opposition parties wish to bring forward that's consistent with how we've been approaching this throughout, right? We want to make sure that we hear from all parties on how we move this process forward.

The proposal seeks to bring the committee to every region of the province. The goal, again, is to speak to as many Ontarians and organizations as possible, and this will give us a chance to hear from as broad an audience as possible across the province in order to best develop amendments for clause-by-clause to bring forward the best possible amended version of the act for the House to consider in second reading debate in September.

One of the features of the plan that I want to highlight is that I think we've tried to build a lot of flexibility into the plan. The communities selected, for example, are a short list from which the committee can reach a consensus. This is a cross-section of the province that covers our regions and a large majority of the population. Where we go and for how long could be left to the subcommittee to decide. This includes whether we sit from Monday to Thursday or Monday to Friday in a given week, for example. If we're oversubscribed on a given day, the subcommittee can decide whether we continue meetings until 9 p.m. that day, as was suggested in the motion. We really want this to be a fruitful discussion amongst us and the presenters, so we've not suggested the classic caucus-by-caucus rotation of questioning. These are examples of the flexibility piece that I was talking about.

Again, we're entirely open to whatever the opposition wishes to add to make this committee process open and successful so that we can send back a version of the bill to the House that reflects the points of view and the expertise of the people in the province.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Further discussion? Ms. Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We just received this proposal this morning. This is going to be a complex process, I think. There are seven of you and there's only one of me on this committee.

At first glance, though, there really is no significant—with regard to the locations under point (2)—opportunity to consult with people in the northeast. So Sudbury, certainly, I think should be on the list. We would really like to see more Toronto dates on the itinerary.

Certainly, it's 2016, so I wonder if there's an opportunity for us to use technology and Skype to ensure that a lot of people do have the opportunity to participate on this committee. This is going to be a significant consultation and people are going to be interested in this, but it is in the summer. I think that we have to try to at least make it as accessible and open as possible. I raise that as an issue, to make this consultation completely accessible.

Under point (4), where the deadline for requests to appear be the Monday before a given week of public hearings, I think we should definitely consider the fact that we should keep this open. We're going to be asking Ontarians to be part of this process during the summer and I think that having a deadline or a cut-off date will prohibit involvement. I would actually like to see, if we have four or five delegations—say, we do go to Sudbury and we hear from them in the morning. If people come into the committee and they want to appear before us, I think they should have that opportunity to do so. Our preference would be to not have a hard cut-off date for submissions, to truly be inclusive on electoral finances.

Just the final point—so Sudbury, technology, even the timeline. We're supportive, of course, of being open to meeting with folks until 9 o'clock, but I think even this 9 p.m. should be flexible. If we're going to do this, let's be completely open and ensure that this committee is flexible to the needs of Ontarians, going forward.

That's our feedback right now.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Mr. Clark.

Mr. Steve Clark: I appreciate the motion that is presented for our discussion. I really do believe that the subcommittee needs to have a chance to look at this. I've just tried to game this motion out myself. We've got an order from the House where we're meeting Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of next week. We've already made a decision by order of the House for the last week of August being clause-by-clause. In addition to those two weeks that are programmed, we now have this motion which deals with four weeks. If we use the same terminology that we use at committee, that's a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. You've got 16 days and 16 communities. I believe it's a very rigid time frame.

I look at these 16 communities and I would love to be able to see from the government their planned schedule on how we're going to get to these 16 communities, how we're going to be able to deal with late delegations, how we are going to be flexible. I think there's a lot of discussion that needs to take place at subcommittee. I also believe that the government needs to have some document on how we're going to accomplish these 16 communities, how we are going to be able to do this. What happens if we are subscribed fully every day until 9 o'clock?

I think Ms. Fife's point about using technology—the fact that there are some gaps in where this committee is travelling, that there are going to be Ontarians who might not be able to get to these locations on the day prescribed. Let's face it: We're travelling in the middle of the summer, with all the constraints that legislators, staff and communities have. I really do believe that a subcommittee needs to be convened as soon as possible so that we can look at this, because I think there has to be a lot of discussion before we come to grips with the schedule.

1250

Chair, through you to Mr. Baker, you're proposing that sometime next week, after we deal with our presenters, we deal with the final subcommittee report? Or are you suggesting that immediately, Monday at 2 o'clock, we deal with your motion? I would like to know how you propose that we move forward.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Thank you. We'll hold your response and go to Mr. Thibeault.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to again acknowledge the opposition on their cooperation with this and the importance of this.

Ms. Fife, what you're asking for with northeastern Ontario is very reasonable, although Sault Ste. Marie would consider themselves the western part of northeastern Ontario. I still think Sudbury and North Bay—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I said Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Yes. I still think Sudbury and North Bay would be great places to look at and go to.

To both points, I think that's something that the subcommittee should get down and—down and dirty to, I guess, is a way I could say it—to get that stuff resolved.

I also think it's important to talk about—I know it was mentioned that Toronto isn't on the list in point (2), but if

we look at the motion that passed the House yesterday, it's a few paragraphs down: "That the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Tuesday, June 7 and Wednesday, June 8, for the purpose of public hearings" and that "the deadline to request to appear for these dates be 12 noon" tomorrow.

So Toronto is the very first place in which it is meeting—but that's not to say that the subcommittee could add more dates to that. I think that's something that should be highlighted as well.

In terms of technology, I think that's key. I'm not going to bring up another motion at the moment because I know we're discussing the first one, Chair, but at some point I'd like to talk a little bit about the threshold for travel. If we don't have things subscribed up to 25%, then I'd like for us to have that consideration. I won't move that right now until this discussion is completed, but that is something that we've considered.

Thank you, Chair, and I'll look forward to further discussion.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Thank you very much. Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I just wanted to address Mr. Clark's question or point. There have been a lot of good suggestions here from all the members who have spoken, so maybe we just ask the subcommittee to have those discussions, tackle these questions and sort that through, maybe early next week, and then have a full meeting of the committee next week—I think it's Wednesday at 4 p.m. or something like that—to approve what the subcommittee has come up with. That would be my initial proposal.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Ms. Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just on the Toronto point: I know from our budget consultations that Toronto is sort of the centre and it's an easy place for people to access. To your point, though, MPP Thibeault, noon tomorrow for our major witness—it's not a long timeline to secure people to come in and talk to us.

I genuinely think that if we dedicate a considerable amount of time to Toronto hearings, that that's actually in the best interest of the process. Toronto is not on this list while it is next week, but for those meetings next week, the deadline is noon tomorrow. I think I can say with great assurance that New Democrats want to see a significant Toronto consultation, because it is a central place for people to come to.

I agree that the subcommittee has some work to organize the north, south, east and west travel schedule, because all of us do have lives outside of this place and some of us had vacation planned. So I do hope to see that breakdown very quickly.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Thank you very much. Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I do agree with Ms. Fife. You are missing out a big part of northeastern Ontario, at least Sudbury or North Bay. As well, Toronto is approaching half the population of this province. We have a meeting

today to decide on the order, and you're talking about a cut-off tomorrow. It doesn't make a lot of sense. You're looking at the possibility of holding a meeting in Toronto very easily—at a least a day or two or more; I'd say probably two days—to enable people to actually come in. A few hours a night doesn't seem to give this justice. This is important.

I know that the government got caught here and that's why they're rushing this through, but that's not our fault and that's not the fault of the people of Ontario. I think the people of Ontario need to be heard and I think that we want to make sure that we put a lot of careful thought so we hear opinions from all the regions that need to be heard. Technology is a possibility, but certainly with the facilities we have here, we should be able to at least sneak in an extra couple of days in Toronto near the end of the process. You're talking about some radical changes here that will affect elections going forward.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Further discussion?

Maybe I should try to summarize this. It looks like there's a way forward with regard to committing to a subcommittee meeting in the near future, so I'd be looking for ideas with regard to that. As well, perhaps, as we set that date, if that's what the committee wishes to do today, I would recommend that the three parties get together and try to come up with some logistics here as to what would be the most effective and efficient way to travel, perhaps adding more dates in Toronto. I don't want to speak for anyone, but I imagine Brockville would want to be on this list at some point, and/or Sudbury and North Bay.

Mr. Steve Clark: My colleague might disagree with you.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Okay. However, in order to facilitate an efficient subcommittee meeting, maybe some background work could be done in working on these types of things.

Madam Clerk, do you have anything that you would need to say as advice to the members of the committee on how we could move forward, from a technical perspective here?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): I guess the idea would be to find a date for the subcommittee meeting, so I'm going to leave it up to you. We are at Wednesday here today. We are meeting next Monday from 2 to 6 p.m. So would we want to meet at some point prior to question period on Monday and/or after question period on Monday, as a subcommittee, to try to provide some definition on how to move forward? Mr. Clark?

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes. I'm not going to be the subcommittee member from our party. It's going to be Mr. Hillier, so I'll want to talk to him. But I'm sure we can work in a subcommittee meeting before that 2 o'clock Monday session. We'll pledge to participate in the subcommittee if it's mutually agreed upon by all three parties.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Ms. Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Because the timelines are so tight here, just as a clarification, though: The cities that

are on this proposal—this is still completely open, because I just heard you say, “Perhaps more Toronto.” I hope that the committee heard that more Toronto needs to be included in this process.

I could meet before question period or after question period on Monday to settle this, but I do think it would be helpful if the Clerk broke down the cities by—if we travel one week in the north and one week in the south and have a central time in east and west. I don’t think we want to hopscotch all over the province, based on just convenience. Also, we need to give the public at least some heads-up that we’re going to be heading into their area.

I’m happy to meet Monday or tomorrow.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): I would just like to remind members also that, if Monday is not a good day, and/or tomorrow, we do meet from 2 to 4 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 7 and 8, so the subcommittee can just stay behind after 4 p.m. on one of those days, and/or both. It might take more than one subcommittee meeting to define how we’re moving forward.

1300

I would like to remind members here that we do have a motion on the floor. The discussion is evolving around this, but perhaps Mr. Baker would consider withdrawing it until such time as more definition is provided. Otherwise, we could be sitting here dealing with all kinds of amendments this afternoon. It’s looking like we’re not prepared to finalize things at this particular meeting.

Mr. Steve Clark: I agree, Chair. I think we’ve put some words on the table. We’ve pledged to meet as a subcommittee. If the member will pull it off, then let the subcommittee do its work. We can have that debate at another time next week.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I’m happy with that. I’m happy to withdraw the motion.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Okay. You don’t need to do it right now, but if there’s further discussion, that’s fine. We can continue to discuss it.

Interjection.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Yes. Toronto is still happening next week, but that’s a separate piece.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: That has already been passed.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Okay. So Mr. Baker, for clarity, could you—

Mr. Yvan Baker: Yes. I’m happy to withdraw the motion.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Mr. Baker has withdrawn the motion that he tabled earlier on in the meeting.

I would also like to nail down a date and time for the first subcommittee meeting. We have a number of options. Mr. Baker?

Mr. Yvan Baker: One of the options proposed—I think it was Mr. Clark; it may not have been you—was maybe Monday after question period. Is that something that would work?

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Monday after question period is a possibility. Okay. Is that fair, Madam Clerk? You’re okay with that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Sylwia Przewdziecki): It’s up to the members, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Do we have consensus here that we could move forward with a subcommittee meeting on Monday, which would be June 6, at approximately 12 noon, following question period? Yes, Ms. Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Because I’m on the subcommittee, I’m just looking at my schedule, and I’m sorry I can’t do—I could do Tuesday either before question period or Tuesday after, because we all have caucus on Tuesday. We can cut into a little bit of caucus time on Tuesday.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): So Ms. Fife is proposing—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Either before or after question period on Tuesday. I have flexibility.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): On Tuesday—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. June 7.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Before or after. Feedback? Is Tuesday acceptable? So Tuesday following question period, around 12 noon. We could probably set a hard time at 12 noon for members of the subcommittee to discuss further the proposal that was tabled by Mr. Baker.

I know that legislative research has some questions or comments. Mr. Parker.

Mr. Jeff Parker: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Very quickly, members, I just need to know from you in advance: Would you be looking for a summary of next week’s proceedings? We can work out the ones for travel when we get to the subcommittee, but for next week, would you like a summary of the proceedings from legislative research?

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Ms. Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Do you mean a breakdown of a proposed travel schedule?

Mr. Jeff Parker: No, no. We’re going to have Mr. Essensa, the Chief Electoral Officer, here on Monday, and then the rest of the witnesses. If you want a summary of what they’ve said and their comments on the bill—

Mr. Steve Clark: Absolutely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That would be great.

Mr. Jeff Parker: Wonderful. The second question is: Are there any background resources that you would like to get ahead of time from us—any research questions you have?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the offer. I think Manitoba and Saskatchewan have moved forward with similar reforms. If we could receive a quick summary of changes that those provinces have put into place, and the timing and dates—not extensive, but just an overview—that would be very helpful for us.

Mr. Steve Clark: I think we should do the federal government as well.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Federal, yes.

Mr. Steve Clark: The changes that they’ve put in.

Mr. Jeff Parker: We’ve been looking into this already, so we’ll be able to get that for you by Monday.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): A couple of reminders: On Monday, June 6, at 2 p.m., we will be

entertaining the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario; on Tuesday at 2 p.m., the leader of the Ontario Green Party; on Wednesday, the House leader from the official opposition will—and if that could be done as soon as possible to assist the Clerk. Also, the third party will be choosing a witness for the Thursday, and if that could be submitted to the Clerk as soon as possible, I'm sure the Clerk's office would appreciate that.

Ms. Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just on next week, because it's going to be a full week, has the government given any consideration—we've put out a number of asks to a number of organizations but, of course, it's a very tight timeline to actually confirm it. Has the government given any thought to a Plan B if the PCs or the NDP can't secure someone within this timeline? Do you know, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): I would ask members of the government if they are able to respond to that particular question. If they're not, perhaps they could get back—

Mr. Yvan Baker: I don't have a quick response for you so we'll have to endeavour to get back to you.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Further discussion? One last thing before everybody leaves—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Right. The Clerk is just indicating as well that the way the motion is written

is that it's a permissive type of motion. It's completely up to the different House leaders in the parties to bring forward a witness; they also have the option not to and, of course, then, we would not sit during that time—for clarification purposes.

Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Jim McDonell: For your first deputations for the city of Toronto—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I can't hear the question.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —do you have to do anything with that today or is that going to be—

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Sorry, what's the question, Mr. McDonell?

Mr. Jim McDonell: You plan on hearing deputants from Toronto for next week—

Mr. Steve Clark: Next week.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Do you have to decide on that today or is that just going to go ahead?

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): The order of the House clearly states—the Clerk will be, and probably has been, receiving submissions—it's first-come, first-served, and we'll see how many actually come forward during that particular time.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Grant Crack): Further discussion? There being none, I shall call this meeting adjourned. Have a great afternoon, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1307.

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