



ISSN 1181-6465

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 8 June 2005

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 8 juin 2005

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Organization

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Organisation

Chair: Cameron Jackson
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : Cameron Jackson
Greffier : Trevor Day

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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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
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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 ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 8 June 2005

Mercredi 8 juin 2005

The committee met at 1532 in room 228.

ORGANIZATION

The Chair (Mr. Cameron Jackson): I'd like to call to order the standing committee on estimates. Welcome, members of the committee. We are here today because the government tabled its estimates, in accordance with the standing orders, on Tuesday, June 7. In accordance with the standing orders, we are going to do our selections and discuss any business that you may wish to raise. I'm led to believe that Monday may be our last day, so it's important that we report this to the House tomorrow, because we won't have an opportunity to have another meeting. Are there any questions from members of the committee about the process of selection?

Ms. Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): Are we going to select first, or are we going to decide the time first?

The Chair: We're going to select first. Usually, we start with the order and then discuss the frequency of meeting and so on and so forth, and/or we can let the subcommittee do that if it deviates too terribly far from the process. So if there are no questions about the selection and the order of selection, then the standing orders are very clear.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I do have a question, just for clarification on the sequence of the rounds. On each round, we have to fill up 15 hours. Is that all three parties or the party that speaks first? Then you could divide the 15 hours by three ministries, by five ministries or whatever.

The Chair: No. The clerk was kind enough to present the copy in front of you. I'm sorry; he didn't give you one?

Mr. O'Toole: This is the standing order here.

The Chair: This is the standing order, and you will see in 59(b)(ii): "In each round, the members of each party may choose the estimates of one or two ministries or offices to be considered." You can choose up to two for a total of not more than 15 hours. You could choose health at eight or nine hours and the Premier's office at four or five, or whichever is your interest.

Mr. O'Toole: We'd like to add Joe Cordiano's office.

The Chair: Are there any other questions? We are seeking either one or two ministries in each round, and please tell us the amount of time that you'd like for those.

The Chair recognizes Mr. O'Toole for the Conservative Party, which picks first.

Mr. O'Toole: We would select, in our first round, the public infrastructure renewal ministry. Our second choice would be, of course, the Ministry of Health. If I have to assign 15 hours, I would take health as a full eight hours, and the remaining seven would be to public infrastructure, where billions of dollars are going to be spent by the private sector in P3 initiatives, so we want to know more about that.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: It's the way I read about it.

The Chair: Those are your choices? I'd now like to move, if the clerk has that clear, to Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): We would like to call children and youth services and finance for seven and a half each.

Ms. Di Cocco: We'd like to call training, colleges and universities and citizenship and immigration for seven and a half each.

The Chair: So in the first round, for those of you who are keeping a ledger, if some have fallen off or re-appeared on your list: Public infrastructure will be seven hours, followed by health at eight, children's services at seven and a half, finance at seven and a half, training, colleges and universities at seven and a half and citizenship at seven and a half.

Do you need a moment to think about—

Mr. O'Toole: No, I'm fine.

My next concern—a serious concern, actually—would be the 23% reduction in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. We have to spend at least—

The Chair: Mr. O'Toole, I hate to interrupt you, but I'd really like you to save all that for—

Mr. O'Toole: For the hearings. OK.

The Chair: Yes. Nobody is going to challenge you on your selection.

Mr. O'Toole: Agriculture and transportation at seven and a half each.

The Chair: You're not choosing education, then?

Mr. O'Toole: No, I'm not choosing it. I'm expecting the ministry—it's their central theme, although there's a work-to-rule going on.

The Chair: Ms. Horwath, do you need a moment?

Ms. Horwath: No, Mr. Chairman. I will put forward education and energy at seven and a half each.

1540

The Chair: Boy, you split everything right down the middle, don't you?

Ms. Horwath: Equity is one of the principles of our party.

Mr. O'Toole: Equity is not the same as fairness.

The Chair: You're doing just fine without the assistance of a male member of your caucus.

OK, Libs, the governing party has the final round.

Ms. Di Cocco: Tourism and recreation and northern development and mines.

The Chair: Time?

Ms. Di Cocco: My understanding is the rules say that it's, what, seven and a half each or—

The Chair: No, any combination up to a maximum of 15. The very first ones Mr. O'Toole picked were public infrastructure renewal for seven hours and health for eight.

Ms. Di Cocco: OK. We can only have two, or does it matter?

The Chair: Only two, unfortunately.

Ms. Di Cocco: OK, then. Seven and a half and seven and a half, please.

The Chair: OK. Does everybody have the list, or shall I read it out for the record? All right.

First will be public infrastructure renewal for seven hours. Second will be health and long-term care for eight hours. Third will be children and youth services at seven and a half hours. Fourth will be finance at seven and a half hours. Fifth will be training, colleges and universities at seven and a half hours. Sixth will be citizenship and immigration at seven and a half hours. Seventh will be agriculture and food at seven and a half hours. Transportation will be number 8, seven and a half hours. Number 9 will be education, seven and a half hours. Ten will be energy at seven and a half hours. Eleven will be tourism and recreation at seven and a half. Northern development will be 12, and it will be for seven and a half hours.

Any questions? I call the vote.

All those in favour? Opposed, if any? Carried.

Shall I report these estimates and their order to the House?

All those in favour? Opposed? Seeing none, carried.

Any new business of the committee?

Let me introduce two absolutely wonderful people, our researcher David McIver, and our Hansard assistant, Peggy Brooks.

David is here because if you need assistance with some research or some information, or if you have requests of ministers, once these are filed with the House and tabled, then you are free to begin the process of seeking information. If you need assistance, David is here to help us. That's why the service is here; use it, if you so choose.

Any other questions—and I can raise some new business.

Mr. O'Toole: We won't be sitting until the fall, or what?

The Chair: You didn't bring a copy of the letter, did you? Yes, you did. You didn't? OK, that's fine.

About a month ago, I wrote a letter to the three House leaders requesting—let me back up. It had come to my attention that we were proroguing and that the government wasn't coming back in accordance with the House calendar. In fact, it was going to come back after Thanksgiving. So it will be the Tuesday following Thanksgiving. I think that's October 14, if memory serves me correctly. That would shave three weeks off the normal meeting time for this committee. I wrote to the House leaders requesting, as I've done many times in the past, additional sitting time during the intersession. I requested two weeks, about eight days, so it'd be Monday through Thursday. In all likelihood, that would be in September, not in July or August, being mindful of the ministers' need to have a vacation—and that of the committee members, for that matter, but more importantly, the ministers'. They historically have appreciated if they're not disrupted in that period in July and August. That is given to you for information. I have nothing to report, in an absolute fashion, in terms of whether or not we've been granted it, but I'm led to believe that we will get our two weeks.

Historically, we start at 9 in the morning and go until 4, but we can go until 5. It's up to the committee, but we can play that by ear. The reason I say that is that if we've got one hour left on a given day, what I've done as Chair is said, "OK, let's take a half-hour lunch"—and the government may want to take 20 minutes off, and we'll negotiate, and then the minister and everyone else doesn't have to come back the next day. Historically, I've appreciated that flexibility, out of courtesy to the minister, in particular, because it really is difficult sometimes to have to come back just for an hour or two.

That's by way of explanation. Any questions?

Interjection.

The Chair: Well, we don't know an actual date. We'll be notifying each of the ministries, obviously, and they'll read it in Hansard, but we will officially notify them through our clerk's office and wait until the House leaders know. This will all reveal itself, either tomorrow or Monday, when we table the motion, because House leaders will have agreed to that by then. I don't we think we need a subcommittee meeting, but if anybody feels strongly about it, I'd recommend we do a conference call and just do business that way. It's worked in the past. If there are any concerns, we'll do it that way, but otherwise, we'll all go to Hamilton, my old hometown, and have a meeting there.

Ms. Horwath: Great idea.

The Chair: Yes. Any other questions? Any other business for the committee?

Mr. O'Toole: I'm a little concerned. I just want to put this on the record, actually. I'd referred Bill 137 to this committee—Ms. Di Cocco, I think, is the point person on this—and several times found very questionable excuses for not meeting. On three occasions, I think the clerk was contacted. I want this on the record, as I'm very disappointed that bill was denied public hearings on a very

important public policy issue. With that, I would move that the meeting be closed.

The Chair: Duly noted.

Ms. Di Cocco: I would suggest that—

Mr. O'Toole: I know you were just doing what you were told.

Ms. Di Cocco: No. I would suggest that the member does not understand some health issues that I was dealing with. Before you said, inappropriately—

Mr. O'Toole: It's not personal.

Ms. Di Cocco: Well, you suggested that they were questionable. I just want to reiterate that, unfortunately, I wish they weren't health reasons and I wish that maybe it had been for other reasons.

Interjection.

The Chair: OK, John. Look, let's—

Mr. O'Toole: It's not personal. Don't try to make it sound like that.

The Chair: However, if we could maybe deal with the business at hand, we do have a bill referred to this committee. If you're asking what the current status of it is, if you have a motion, Mr. O'Toole, to deal with that, then you can raise. But hearing none, I will—

Mr. O'Toole: Chair, if we're going to make it that way, a note was sent. The clerk was quite advised; I had spoken with the clerk. I find it an affront and I find it

insulting to have it implied that I was personally attacking you. Your committee, your House leader knew. They denied attendance to that committee—not you personally; that has nothing to do with it.

My point is this: There are four members sitting over there. That bill was doing nothing more than receiving public hearings. To be treated that way, in a high-handed, disrespectful way, I find to be less than parliamentary. I find that attitude, that somehow I'm an insensitive beast and everyone else is above reproach, unacceptable and typical of your treatment of opposition and third-party members.

I'm very discouraged by this process. I hope this is required and recorded, because you knew quite well—that bill, Bill 137, was very high up on the preference list and now, thanks to your—I would say “barrier”—creating an artificial barrier, it denies the people of Ontario a benefit. And I'm being treated like somehow I'm the insensitive person. You should look in the mirror at who is really insensitive on this thing.

The Chair: I'm not hearing a motion at the moment. Hearing none, and hearing no other business for the committee, this meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1550.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 8 June 2005

Organization..... E-377

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Chair / Président

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington PC)

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Mr. John O'Toole (Durham PC)

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