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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

Thursday 13 April 2006

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Jeudi 13 avril 2006

**Standing committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Use of technology

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Utilisation de la technologie

Chair: Bob Delaney
Clerk: Tonia Grannum

Président : Bob Delaney
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Thursday 13 April 2006

Jeudi 13 avril 2006

The committee met at 1542 in committee room 1.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Bob Delaney): Okay, we have quorum. Welcome to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. Pursuant to our agenda, considering agenda item number 1, the report of the subcommittee. Mr. Sergio.

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I move the report.

The Chair: You have to read it.

Mr. Sergio: Do I have to read it?

The Chair: Now an elocution lesson from the always articulate Mr. Sergio.

Mr. Sergio: Your subcommittee met on Monday, April 10, 2006, to consider the method of proceeding on Bill 190, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting one new Act, and recommends the following:

(1) That the clerk of the committee, with the authorization of the Chair, post information regarding public hearings on Bill 190 on the Ontario parliamentary channel and the committee's website.

(2) That interested parties who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation on Bill 190 contact the clerk of the committee by 12 o'clock noon on Tuesday, April 18, 2006.

(3) That the deadline for written submissions on Bill 190 be 5 p.m. on Wednesday, April 19, 2006.

(4) That the committee meet for public hearings on Thursday, April 20, 2006, subject to witness demand.

(5) That witnesses be offered a maximum of 20 minutes for their presentation and that the clerk of the committee, with the authorization of the Chair, may amend the amount of time allotted for witness presentations in order to accommodate all requests to appear.

(6) That the subcommittee meet to determine additional public hearing dates, if the clerk of the committee receives more requests to appear than can be accommodated on April 20, 2006.

(7) That the committee meet for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 190 immediately following public hearings on Thursday, April 20, 2006, and if required on Thursday, April 27, 2006.

(8) That the committee request that the appropriate Ministry of the Attorney General staff associated with

Bill 190 be present during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

(9) That for administrative purposes, proposed amendments should be filed with the clerk of the committee one business day prior to the commencement of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 190.

(10) That the clerk of the committee, in consultation with the Chair, be authorized prior to the adoption of the report of the subcommittee to commence making any preliminary arrangements necessary to facilitate the committee's proceedings.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Discussion?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): Excuse me; just one question. I'm sure you probably have an answer for it. If from the public hearings there come suggestions for amendments, but you have to have a day's warning or advance notice before the clause-by-clause starts—according to this, they're on the same day—how does that work, might I ask?

The Chair: It is possible to bring in amendments during clause-by-clause.

Mr. Miller: Okay. We could have public hearings and immediately do amendments on the spot and they would be acceptable.

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee to adopt the report of the subcommittee? Done.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Chair: Agenda item number 2, review of the use of technology in the chamber pursuant to the Report on Members' Use of Portable Technologies in the Legislative Precinct. Any discussion of the draft report?

Mr. Peter Sibenik: I could take the committee through the draft report. If that's the wish of the committee, we can go through it page by page.

Mr. Miller: Do you mean the short version?

Mr. Sibenik: I was going to take you through the long version since the short version is basically a précis of the recommendations that are contained in here. What I was going to suggest is we go through the long version and I would change the short version according to the wishes of the committee at the end of the exercise.

The Chair: The Chair has an event at 6 and wishes this to be concise, if possible.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes.

Mr. Miller: Why don't you do the executive summary version?

Mr. Sibenik: I can do that. The executive summary version of the report, not the précis, or does the committee want me to go through the précis?

Mr. Miller: Sure.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes. The report is only 14 pages long; perhaps we can start at the text of the report. I don't have anything at page 4.

Mr. Sergio: Isn't this the digested version of the report?

Mr. Sibenik: This is the two-page précis of the recommendations. We're going to go through the 14-page report that should be in your papers on your desk. I was going to start there.

At page 5, I have a suggestion for the committee: the second paragraph at the end where it says, "... that MPPs who do not have the floor may use silent PDAs and pagers." I was going to add—

Mr. Miller: Is it page 5 we're talking about?

Mr. Sibenik: Yes, page 5, at the very end of the second paragraph, "... that MPPs who do not have the floor may use silent PDAs and pagers." I was going to suggest the addition of the words "but not portable computers and cellphones," because that is the—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It's actually the third paragraph.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): The second full paragraph?

Mr. Sibenik: Yes, that's correct. The words that I was going to suggest be added are "but not portable computers and cellphones," since that is the existing practice. That paragraph talks about the existing practice, and the existing practice is not to allow portable computers and the use of cellphones on the floor of the chamber. Okay?

1550

Mr. Miller: Fine.

Mr. Sibenik: I didn't have anything else on that page. On page 6, the fourth bullet point, about halfway down, "In the jurisdictions that allow members to use portable computers..." I think it might be wise for the report to define what is meant by portable computers in this document. By that, I mean laptops, notebooks and tablet computers. I do refer to that elsewhere, but I think it should be explicitly indicated so that there's no confusion on the part of the reader.

Mr. Miller: So laptops, notebooks and—

Mr. Sibenik: And tablets. I use that expression elsewhere in the report so that everybody knows. I don't have anything else on that page, unless someone else does, nor on page 7 or 8.

On page 9 there are a few issues that the committee would have to resolve. The second bullet point has the first of several editorial notes that I've made in here. In the first one, I'm suggesting perhaps that the words "that are capable of attaching to or connecting with a PDA, portable computer etc. (by direct, wired or wireless connection)" be added to the end of the list. The reason for that is that there are different ways by which

peripherals can communicate, so to speak, with a piece of technology. It could be wireless, it could be wired or it could be a direct attachment. So I'm just wondering whether the committee wants the report to cover all the bases—any kind of means by which there is an outboard peripheral that is being used in harmony with a portable computer.

Mr. Miller: So you're saying they're banned no matter how they're connected?

Mr. Sibenik: That's right.

Mr. Miller: Okay, that's fine.

Mr. Sibenik: That's what I'm suggesting there.

The Chair: Can I raise a point? I'm just going to ask members on this. Should that include an external hard drive or an external CD or DVD reader? I don't have a problem with an external hard drive or an external DVD or CD reader or, for that matter, an external mouse connected by a USB cable. When we refer to an outboard peripheral, it would be to perform a function not related to the operation of the computer—for example, a printer, a scanner, a speaker.

Mr. Sibenik: Right now it's worded quite broadly. It says "printers, scanners, external drives, external speakers, and other outboard peripherals" are not allowed. So in a sense, the Chair is asking, I believe, for some kind of clarification or a modification that those items would be permissible.

Ms. Mossop: I guess you're suggesting that if somebody had all those contained in their laptop already, they would be able to utilize them. So you're just allowing it for somebody who might not have those built in.

The Chair: Pretty much, or if someone for whatever reason in the course of doing their work wants to read information off a CD or a DVD, that seems to me to fall within the intent of the permitted use.

Ms. Mossop: Yes, and it could just be a matter of their technologies and we shouldn't send people scrambling off to buy things unduly.

The Chair: For example, a laptop normally has a built-in CD or DVD reader; a tablet does not.

Ms. Mossop: Right.

Mr. Miller: Chair, how much noise would be associated with—

Interjection.

Mr. Miller: Isn't there a little bit of a whirring noise?

The Chair: Understanding, if indeed there was, hypothetically you could just put the device in your desk.

Ms. Mossop: I suppose if there's a lot of whirring or whizzing and all the rest related to what we're doing here, it's probably going to get batted back to us anyway.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Sibenik: The committee is okay with those technologies—

Mr. Sergio: Yes.

Mr. Sibenik: Okay. The second editorial note was probably covered already perhaps, but no fax machines. That's not added in the list.

Mice: I think the Chair has already said that an external mouse is okay. I think the committee has already agreed to that.

Collapsible keyboards: These are the kinds of keyboards that attach to a PDA and flip open and sort of make it easier to use the keyboard, in a sense. I don't know if that is something that the committee objects to or is okay with, or just leave it out altogether and let—

Ms. Mossop: I guess it doesn't really make any difference, does it, in terms of the level of noise or distraction that it might create? That's the most important thing, isn't it, in these considerations?

Mr. Sibenik: Okay?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Sibenik: The third bullet point, "AC adapters and extension cords": Perhaps the addition of the word "cables"? Except for the fact that the committee's already said that an external mouse is now okay, an external hard drive, DVD/CD reader? Perhaps leave it out?

The Chair: I have a suggestion on that: Just take it out completely. Mr. Bisson brought up a point to me in the House, that there isn't a problem with the committee recommending that at some time the assembly install electrical outlets. There's no point in bringing in an AC adapter if there's no place to plug it in; ditto with an extension cord. Should there at some future time be electrical outlets installed, this particular bullet point would then be redundant. My suggestion is to leave it out.

Mr. Sibenik: The entire bullet point?

The Chair: The entire bullet point.

Mr. Sibenik: Okay. The fifth bullet point, "Sound-emitting technologies": They would be not allowed. I'm just wondering whether a rumbling BlackBerry qualifies as a sound-emitting technology.

Ms. Mossop: A what?

Mr. Sibenik: A BlackBerry that vibrates on a member's desk, for example, that doesn't have a foam pad under it. It's come up in previous committee meetings, that members have said that sometimes they can make a little bit of a buzz, a vibration.

Mr. Miller: A buzz, and the way it's working at this time is that if it's on your desk and it buzzes, the Speaker or the Sergeant at Arms comes to collect your BlackBerry. That's the way it is right now, because it does get picked up by the audio system.

Ms. Mossop: They should be on silent if they're going to be in the House. The buzzing is distracting. It's noisy.

Mr. Sergio: Yes, sometimes.

Mr. Sibenik: The committee wouldn't want me to mention anything about those in this particular bullet point. Do I understand the committee correctly? Just leave it out and—

Mr. Miller: I would say.

Mr. Sibenik: Okay.

Under guideline 2, continuing down on that page, the very first line there, "Notwithstanding guideline 1"—I realized in retrospect that that perhaps is somewhat confusing. I'm suggesting the replacement of that initial phrase, "Notwithstanding guideline 1 ... " with the expression, "With respect to their unobtrusive technologies...." The background on this with respect to

guideline 1 is that that deals with technologies that are obtrusive versus unobtrusive. If a technology is unobtrusive, that doesn't necessarily mean that a member can use any function whatsoever on that unobtrusive technology. That function might be covered under guideline number 2. The function, for example, might be unacceptable. As a result of that, I think that with respect to both that first paragraph and the second one, it needs a better qualifier and I'm suggesting the qualifier "With respect to their unobtrusive technologies...." It reads a little bit better. Okay?

The Chair: Fine.

Mr. Sibenik: The editorial note, still sticking with that first paragraph, "Is the use of a data disk obtrusive or unobtrusive?"

The Chair: Resolved.

Mr. Sibenik: Resolved. Okay. Perhaps leave any mention there out, at least in this spot here.

Under the second paragraph, should the phrase "and other standard office applications" be added to the list?

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Ms. Mossop: I'm just curious: MPPs may use unobtrusive technological functions in the chamber, for example, e-mail, instant messaging, word processors etc. In the previous one, it said that picture-taking was not allowed. They do have those little phone cameras now where you can take pictures pretty unobtrusively. I would think that that would be something we would not want to allow.

Mr. Sibenik: That's right. Picture-taking would not be allowed as a function.

Ms. Mossop: Is that inherently clear, even though it's not mentioned in the second paragraph?

Mr. Sibenik: This second paragraph here deals with things that would be allowed. The first paragraph deals with things that would not be allowed. Picture-taking is in the unacceptable list.

The Chair: As well, nothing this committee can adopt will override the standing orders of the House, and the standing orders of the House are very specific with regard to the recording of sound and the taking of pictures.

Ms. Mossop: Okay, great.

Mr. Sibenik: So it's the addition of "other standard office applications." Do you want the Internet added to this list as well?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Sibenik: No? Take it out? Okay.

The Chair: When you say add the Internet, using the Internet is okay or using the Internet is out?

Mr. Sibenik: This is an acceptable.

The Chair: It should be an acceptable.

Mr. Sibenik: This is why I'm asking whether or not—

The Chair: I'm sorry; I misunderstood.

Interjection: It's in the second paragraph, so it's an acceptable.

Mr. Sibenik: Guideline 3 deals with temporal restrictions on portable computers. That basically means that during those four times of the day indicated by those four

bullet points, portable computers could not be used. That does not mean that other kinds of technologies could not be used; for example, PDAs. I just want to make sure the committee is aware of that.

The contrast is with guidelines 4 and 5. Those guidelines apply to all portable technologies, not just to the portable computers.

The editorial note under guideline 4: For reasons of convenience or an eyesight issue, can the technology be placed on top of books that are on MPPs' desks?

The Chair: On that topic, in discussing it with Mr. Hardeman and Mr. Bisson, we couldn't see any particular reason for requiring that it physically remain on a member's desk. My suggestion is to delete bracket (a) and just put a period after the words, "speaking aid."

Mr. Sibenik: Yes. So the Speaker would simply have to be satisfied that "the MPP is using it as a prop instead of as a speaking aid." Okay.

This next guideline deals with MPPs who are adjacent to the MPP who has the floor. I have difficulty with the use of the word "adjacent." Tonia and I are adjacent to Mr. Delaney, but if there's somebody in front of him or somebody behind him, those individuals would not be adjacent.

Mr. Miller: "Nearby," maybe?

Mr. Sibenik: I was going to suggest the use of the word, "near," if that is what the committee wants. Is the committee interested in anybody who's around the member?

Mr. Sergio: "Adjacent" doesn't mean front or back?

Mr. Sibenik: "Adjacent" usually means beside. Tonia and I are beside Mr. Delaney right now, but if there is a member over here or a member behind him, who he could possibly be distracted by—

Mr. Sergio: You can't say "near to"?

Mr. Sibenik: "Near."

The Chair: The cameras can't see the details above or below the member who has the floor, so if the words "are adjacent to" are substituted with "sit beside," would that work?

Mr. Sergio: The cameras will take anything.

Mr. Sibenik: The intent of this one is that members who are near the member who has the floor, if they're using their technology, shouldn't be disrupting the member who does have the floor. That is the idea. That disruption could happen—

Ms. Mossop: Just take out "who are adjacent" and say, "MPPs should not be using their technology to distract a speaker," regardless of where they sit in the House—anywhere in the House—if it's causing a distraction.

Mr. Sibenik: Okay, thank you. Now, on page 11, dealing with the infrastructure issues, the subcommittee at the last meeting took out the recommendation—

Interjection.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes, that would be the paragraph at the top of page 12. It's the wish of the committee that it no longer be in the report. This way, I think, the options are open for the committee.

Now, I've yet to get the actual numbers at the bottom of page 11 of the costs for power supply. There's coordination that has to happen between different branches to get the actual numbers, but it will be quite expensive. There are cabling considerations, there are heritage considerations, coordination between at least two branches. It's been done in other Parliaments, but it's in the hundreds of thousands of dollars to do that. I'll provide the committee with the exact numbers when they become available.

Mr. Miller: Mr. Chair, did you have some comments on—I thought you had said you had spoken with Mr. Bisson about this option.

The Chair: In the sense that in looking at this, if we're going to recommend that the Speaker consider installing AC power outlets, perhaps we could just make the recommendation; not micromanage the cost of installing the AC outlets, but pass along the recommendation to the Speaker, who is charge of the legislative precinct, to make the determination.

Ms. Mossop: I think the Chair's recommendation is sound. At first glance or take, though, I don't think it's a great direction to go in. By the time we got through all the issues and expenditures, probably technology will have gotten to the point where the batteries will be sufficient, without having to tear up our lovely old building and go to great lengths and potentially hazardous situations with cords. It all sounds terribly messy and complicated and dangerous and expensive.

Mr. Miller: I gather from what you're saying it is very expensive.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes.

Mr. Miller: You're thinking it's hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Mr. Sibenik: If the committee is looking, for example, at kind of a ballpark figure as to what the installation of AC power with a hard-wired network connection would be, it would be in excess of \$400,000.

Mr. Miller: So the hard-wired network—sorry, is that for the Internet connection or is that just for power?

Mr. Sibenik: For the network connection plus the power outlets together, it's in excess of \$400,000.

Mr. Miller: But we wouldn't need a network connection because we'd have Wi-Fi.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes.

Mr. Miller: What about just the AC then?

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Mr. Sibenik: For the AC power with the wireless network connection it would be in excess of \$200,000. If you're looking simply at the wireless network connection, that is under \$100,000.

The exact numbers I've yet—

The Chair: One hundred thousand?

Mr. Sibenik: It's under, I'm saying.

The Chair: Yes, much under.

Mr. Sibenik: Yes. It's probably in excess of \$50,000.

Mr. Miller: For the whole building?

Mr. Sibenik: That's what's under consideration right now by various branches within the Office of the Assembly, but it's not in the order of \$20,000; put it that way.

Mr. Miller: Based on your rough estimates, I don't think I'd want to recommend AC power to all the members' desks at this point. It's something that can be revisited in the future, but I wouldn't want to be recommending that as something we're directing.

The Chair: Perhaps we should leave it out of the report and, as the Speaker is responsible for the precinct, let the Speaker address that.

Mr. Miller: Sure.

Mr. Sibenik: Leave not only the recommendation but the entire discussion out?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a real problem why we would even be discussing it. As a committee and in the process, we would be discussing whether we want lights, but how those lights are powered is not something that a politician decides; it's something that the staff or whoever, under the direction of the Speaker, would decide, how this is going to be installed. If we're talking about service, it's somebody in the service department who decides whether it should be run by independent batteries or whether it should have AC current there. I just don't think it should be in there at all. I don't think it's relevant.

The issue of wired technology as opposed to wireless technology is a technology decision, and I have to bring that forward. Maybe my colleague has already done that.

The Chair: We're just getting to that.

Mr. Hardeman: We have some members who have a concern about wireless technology, so this is not an argument or a discussion about how the Speaker should install it, but whether we, as a committee, would recommend one over the other, because there are people whose decision as to whether we should have technology in the chamber is based on that if it's wireless, they don't want it at all. So that really does go into our position on recommending that we have technology, as to whether we decide that in order to deal with that issue, we should have it hard-wired, for wired access, as opposed to wireless access. I think that's legitimate.

Mr. Miller: I don't understand the difference between wireless versus wired, except wired is a lot more expensive to install. Otherwise, maybe the Chair, who's the expert on the technology part of it, can tell us if there's any difference.

Mr. Hardeman: My colleague in particular who mentioned it believes that the radio waves from wireless are in fact hazardous to your health, and he has real concerns about putting it in the Legislature and making the Legislature less safe for the people in it than it presently is. So not agreeing with the approach, he was going to get some scientific data that is out in the system that proves that. I think that's an issue that we need to address or need to talk about and say, "Okay, we agree," or, "We disagree," because it does make a difference in my recommendation as to whether we actually have technology in there, depending on what type, whereas with AC power or battery, I don't see the—

The Chair: Before we get ahead of ourselves, are we agreed that the section regarding the power supply should be deleted?

Mr. Miller: Yes.

Ms. Mossop: I did kind of like your initial suggestion, which was to leave it in the hands of the Speaker, seeing that he's responsible for the precinct, because I think what we're setting in motion now is something that's going to take on a bit of a life of its own anyway. There's going to be some evolution here still. Do you know what I mean? If this is going to become much more standard fare, are we going to need electrical outlets? Eventually is that all going to be unobtrusively hard-wired into our desks at some point because one day we're just going to have laptops almost built in because that's the wave of the future, and/or should we assume, maybe, that portable batteries will become so much better that we won't even need that sort of hard-wiring? Do you know what I mean? There's a second-guessing of where the future of technology is going and where the future of the use of that technology is going that I'm not sure we can even answer. I kind of liked your suggestion of leaving it in the Speaker's purview.

The Chair: Would there be a problem in Ms. Mossop's suggestion that the reference to AC adapters rest with the Speaker?

Mr. Miller: That's fine by me.

Ms. Mossop: Just the plug-ins.

Mr. Hardeman: That's leaving the issue in but just saying the Speaker can decide?

Ms. Mossop: My point was—I mean, we're allowing portable laptops in and they have internal batteries now. The question is, do we want to have AC units at everybody's desk so they can now come in and plug in their laptop? I can see us all crawling around under our desks or whatever, trying to plug these in. But I think there's an evolution in technology, an evolutionary process here, that would require us to do a fair bit of second-guessing as to where this is going to lead. This is a fairly large step forward as it is, to allow these things in, so what's the next step? Does technology catch up so that the internal batteries become better and AC becomes obsolete? Or do we indeed have to do AC at some point because we're just going to have laptops on every single member's desk? That's why I'm thinking just leave it, as the Chair had suggested, in the purview of the Speaker to consider those issues as they become relevant, really.

Mr. Hardeman: I guess my position would be that we would be better served to take it right out of the report. I don't believe how they're going to be powered is relevant. I think the question is, are we going to allow laptops into the Legislature? If the Speaker, in his infinite wisdom, decides it should be hard-wired in for the AC, so be it, but I don't know why we would need any further discussion. I don't think we should even discuss it in the report as to how they're going to be powered.

Ms. Mossop: Okay, that's fine. The end result is there, I guess.

Mr. Hardeman: I think if we leave it in the way it is and just say it's in the Speaker's purview, that in fact it is a decision to be made—

Ms. Mossop: Yes. We were sort of leading him somewhere—

Mr. Hardeman: There is no decision to be made unless he wants to bring the issue up himself.

The Chair: Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Sibenik: On page 12, dealing with network access, the fifth line, at the end of it where it says, "being able," the word "to" should go in after "able." It should read "able to access."

In the next paragraph, on network drops, again, this is a cost issue as well. As soon as I have that information, I'll supply it to the committee.

Mr. Miller: Sorry. Network drops: Is that what you're talking about?

Mr. Sibenik: Yes.

The Chair: Ethernet access.

Mr. Sibenik: Does the committee wish to further instruct me on that?

Mr. Miller: Chair, do you have some feeling about this?

The Chair: If you wish to make it technically correct, you can say "wired Ethernet access."

Mr. Miller: Does it make sense to get prices on this?

Mr. Sibenik: Well, we are in the process of getting that, if the committee wants it, yes, and I'll supply that as well.

In section (c), wireless access points, I didn't have anything in that except at the end, the numbers for that. There are a number of issues associated with—it's not just a question of installing the actual access points. There are things that have to go in there, like environmental assessment, design fees, core drilling and wall repairs that have to occur as well, so that's why some of the costs do tend to bump up. It's not just the actual equipment that LIS would be installing there. As soon as I have a hard number, I will supply that to the committee.

Those are all my issues.

Mr. Miller: On the estimate of numbers, do you get one price or do you get it from a few companies, or how does that work? Is there a set procedure for that?

Mr. Sibenik: These estimates would be supplied by the different branches that have expertise in estimating. I'm not sure what their process is. They may well have estimators on staff, and they engage in these kinds of activities.

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Mr. Miller: It's an estimate, so if you actually went to do the work, I assume there's a tendering process at that point, where you get three tenders so you have a competitive price.

Mr. Sibenik: I'm not familiar with the tendering process of the individual branches, but there is a protocol. Perhaps the next time the committee meets I can find out that information and supply it to the committee.

The Chair: Further discussion on the report?

Mr. Hardeman: Mr. Chairman, this is where I want to put on the record the concern about the wired and the wireless, the concerns expressed by—

The Chair: The member has in fact come to speak to me about the same thing. Would it be acceptable if we ask our researcher to see whether there is any reputable body of evidence that suggests if there is any effect at all with regard to a Wi-Fi access point? Would that be acceptable to you?

Mr. Hardeman: That would suit me really well. Thank you very much.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): Bob, would you repeat that?

The Chair: I asked if the researcher would examine to see whether there is any reputable body of evidence that indicates any effect whatsoever on health with regard to the installation of a Wi-Fi access point.

Mr. Sibenik: There have been a number of reports in the press about the very issue that the member raised. The reports come in the wake of announcements by the head of Lakehead University in Thunder Bay banning wireless access points in that particular institution because the head there is concerned about the health and safety issues. The second issue is the Toronto Hydro announcement about wireless access on the top of telephone poles. In the wake of that announcement there was a rehash of some of the health and safety issues.

I will provide the report for the committee, but ultimately the science is disputed on the health and safety issues. There are people on both sides of the issue, and I will present for the committee the complete package so that the committee is in a position to make a decision on this.

Mr. Hardeman: I do want to say I don't personally have any evidence or any concern, for that matter, but I think it's important that—you mentioned Lakehead University. That's where the original concern came from. I think it's important that we at least look into that so that as a committee making the recommendation for wireless we understand that there are concerns by some, even though we do not necessarily agree with that position. I think if it's on the record that we are getting that information, that will serve the purpose as to why I brought it up.

The Chair: To put it in perspective, my iPAQ, which does not transmit but only receives—if I were to stick this iPAQ out the window, it would detect the presence of several Wi-Fi wireless networks already installed in this area. Would it be acceptable to allow the Speaker to make this particular determination, subject to the research provided?

Mr. Hardeman: I don't have any problem with leaving it the way it is, with the information provided. I think it's important that we get the information for the decision to be made. At the end of the day, the Speaker is going to have to make a decision about whether he adopts our report based on the opposition that someone will put forward to it. I think we do our best and make

sure all the information is available to the decision-makers beyond where we decide.

The Chair: Further discussion on the report or the pricing?

Mr. Hardeman: On the whole report?

The Chair: On any part of the report or on the pricing.

Mr. Hardeman: The other thing I'd like to suggest—as we presented it to our caucuses it was brought up, and there was some discussion at the previous committee meeting too—is about the different types of equipment that would be on people's desk and the Speaker could decide whether the computer was too big and was obstructing someone else's view and so forth. It was suggested by my caucus, because of the inability to increase one individual member's budget, that as we bring this forward, to be equal and fair to everyone and have consistent equipment for everyone, we should recommend to the Speaker that the Legislative Assembly provide the units that everyone uses in the Legislature. They would still be individual units for the members, but in fact every one that was in the Legislature would be an identical unit. The Speaker could then decide what type of unit that would be, or the administration could decide that, and it would then be, as your telephone is—incidentally the telephone structure has been changed in the last two years. Where it used to be part of the member's global budget, it is now part of the Legislative Assembly budget in order to deal with the rising cost of running our individual offices. This would be the same thing. Not everyone is presently going to have a laptop that would meet the requirements in the House, so they would be expected to provide one of their own.

Some of my caucus members recommended that we make a recommendation to the Board of Internal Economy that they look into buying and providing an individual unit for every member of the Legislature as part of your Legislative Assembly equipment.

Mr. Sergio: I have one request: There are some members who may not want to use it—

The Chair: Just to clarify, to see if I understand Mr. Hardeman's suggestion: You're suggesting that we ask the Speaker that the Legislative Assembly assume responsibility for the provision of notebooks and laptops, but that the lack of that should not prevent members who already have technology from being able to use it in the House, pursuant to the adoption of this report?

Mr. Hardeman: My position would be that the two are completely unlinked. This would be a recommendation in the report, and the Speaker is not going to be obligated to implement the report in its entirety or accept parts of it. I see no reason why the Speaker couldn't just continue on and implement the report as he saw fit, but the Board of Internal Economy decide not to provide them and then each would have to provide their own.

I believe it is in the purview of this committee to recommend to the Board of Internal Economy that they look at providing a uniform equipment allowance for the Legislative Assembly, partly for the members' budgets

but primarily to make sure we have a uniform look in the Legislature, that everybody has the same thing on their desk and we don't have one that's much larger than someone else's and obstructing their neighbour's view and then having the Speaker rule that I can't use the one I just bought and paid big dollars for because it has too large a screen and it's obstructing the person behind me. Everyone would have the same equipment in the Legislature.

The Chair: Okay. Again, for clarification before I go to Mr. Sergio, are you proposing that this be the third recommendation in the report?

Mr. Hardeman: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Sergio, and then Mr. Miller.

Mr. Sergio: I have no problem with uniformity. The problem is that some members may not want to use any of the technologies in the House. We should not go to the expense of buying it and then let it sit on some desk. I believe we should approve it, and if they want it, they should make a request.

The Chair: Mr. Miller? No problem? Okay.

Mr. Sibenik: Could I just clarify what would be uniform: the actual equipment or the allowance?

Mr. Hardeman: The equipment.

Mr. Sibenik: The equipment would be uniform. Thank you.

Mr. Miller: Mr. Chair, you being the technology expert among us, I'd like to get your feeling about it. It would be my feeling that probably people would have different preferences of what sort of equipment they might want, so uniformity doesn't necessarily make things better. You might want to use an iBook, and somebody else might want to use something else and may already have it.

The Chair: What I hear Mr. Hardeman suggesting isn't that the Speaker should say, "You'll use this specific brand name and this specific model," but that the Speaker can say, "You can use a tablet, as currently defined by industry standards, a laptop, as currently defined by industry standards." Is that correct?

Mr. Hardeman: My recommendation is not near as elaborate or precise as that. I think that the technology we're recommending be allowed would be provided by the Legislative Assembly and the budget that runs it, not by my global budget from my constituency office, period.

Mr. Miller: What about choice of type of device? Would that be up to the member?

Mr. Hardeman: I think it's up to the Speaker to decide how they want to deal with that. The Board of Internal Economy makes that decision, not our committee.

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Mr. Sergio: So you're leaving uniformity out now?

Mr. Hardeman: No, I think it should be uniform, but then again, I don't profess to understand what the Board of Internal Economy will do, whether they would buy everybody an identical tablet or whether they would put stipulations on what they needed to buy and they get the

money for it. I just say it shouldn't be part of my or anyone's global budget. If this is a tool that I need in the Legislative Assembly—my office budget already has considerable difficulty making sure that we make ends meet, with the constituency offices I'm running now, without getting increases in that. If we're suggesting we're going to have more expenses, we should ask the Board of Internal Economy to cover those.

The Chair: Are you considering a recommendation with words such as "the Speaker should consider" and "the Speaker may recommend" and giving the Speaker some discretion in this regard, for the purposes of clarification?

Mr. Hardeman: I don't believe we have any choice but to give the Speaker the discretionary power to ask or not to ask the Board of Internal Economy to pay for them. It's that simple. We don't have the power to tell them they have to, nor do I want to suggest that if they decide not to pay, that should throw out the whole report. I'm just saying that as a group, we should recommend that that's how they should do it, that the Board of Internal Economy should put money in place in order to facilitate this recommendation.

The Chair: Are you comfortable with the researcher drafting that recommendation pursuant to our comments and making it the third recommendation?

Mr. Hardeman: Yes.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on this third recommendation? Do we need to vote on it?

Mr. Sibenik: I think we need to get the precise wording on this. I can work on it and pass it by the committee or the subcommittee for approval, if that's the wish of the committee, but I think we do need some precise wording here, unless somebody is prepared to actually say what the wording should be in this case.

The Chair: Is the committee willing to give the subcommittee the authority to approve the third recommendation pursuant to the discussion here today?

Mr. Miller: The only thing I'd like to be clear about from my perspective is, I don't think the devices need to be uniform. I think what Mr. Hardeman is raising is that the funding should not come out of the members' global budgets. I think that's the main point he's making. I would like to see the choice of the type of technology be up to the members, especially because in many cases—I'm sure in your case, you won't need to buy any device. You probably have half a dozen of them already. In my case, I would probably want one device that I'm going to carry with me and use in the Legislative Assembly, in my riding and in my apartment, and the fewer devices I have the better, as far as I'm concerned. So it may not be necessary to buy another one. I think the main point Mr. Hardeman is making is that the funding for it should come not from members' global budgets but from the Legislative Assembly budget. The main point that I'd

like to make is that I don't want to see it uniform in terms of the choice of technology.

Mr. Hardeman: Personally, I believe there are some positives to uniformity, so we don't have the issue of big and small and one is allowed and one isn't. I guess I would suggest that those of us who have sufficient capacity today to implement this without making an extra expenditure will, I am sure, before it's implemented, have traded or changed some of their equipment already, because new technology has moved in. Even in our constituency office, every time you turn around, somebody is there putting in more technology and changing the way things happen, because we advance. I'm not suggesting that everybody who presently has a laptop that could be used for it—in fact, I have likely more than one that I could use for that purpose. I'm sure if there's an allotment and they say, "This allotment is to buy laptops that you can use in the Legislature. You can use them anywhere you want and you can buy them when you need to," most members in their term of office, even if it's the first term of office, will replace the one they're using now with another one that's going to be paid for by the Legislative Assembly. I really believe that the intent of this is just to make sure that the cost of implementing this program does not fall on the global budgets of the individual members but in fact is a cost to the overall Legislative Assembly.

The Chair: It sounds to me like you may have to take yes for an answer. Further discussion on Mr. Hardeman's proposal? Mr. Hardeman, would you be comfortable with the subcommittee, on which you sit, evaluating the wording from the researcher and having the authority to add this? Any problem with that? Okay.

Any further discussion on the report?

Mr. Sibenik: I don't have a question, just one clarification on the health issue, for example. The committee does not want me to leave a footprint in the report as of yet, pending its consideration of the materials that I'm going to get them on this potential health issue. Is that correct? No reference whatsoever, and the subcommittee can decide on that as well as the rest of the report? Okay. I understand.

The Chair: Shall the title of the report be "Report on the Members' Use of Portable Technologies in the Legislative Precinct"? Agreed.

Shall the draft report, as amended, and subject to the final approval of the third recommendation by the subcommittee, be adopted? Agreed.

Shall I present the report to the Speaker once approved? Okay.

I think we're done. Once the subcommittee report has been approved and presented to the Speaker, this matter is complete.

Please be advised that we'll meet next week to consider Bill 190. We're adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1637.

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