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Wednesday 30 March 2011

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Mercredi 30 mars 2011

Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly

Organization

Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative

Organisation

Chair: Bas Balkissoon
Clerk: Tonia Grannum

Président : Bas Balkissoon
Greffière : Tonia Grannum

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Wednesday 30 March 2011

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The committee met at 1300 in room 228.

ORGANIZATION

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to all members.

You have the agenda in front of you, and the first—or the only—item that I see on the agenda is the appointment to the subcommittee on committee business. Do I have a motion? Ms. Jones.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to move that Steve Clark replace Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, on the subcommittee on committee business.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Okay.

Mr. Dave Levac: I second it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Mr. Levac, thank you. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mr. Dave Levac: It was a cliffhanger.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): So the membership of the subcommittee is as follows: The Chair is the Chair, and Mrs. Van Bommel, Mr. Clark and Mr. Prue are the members of the subcommittee.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Okay, any other items? Mr. Clark?

Mr. Steve Clark: I just had a question. Upon reviewing the package that the clerk sent to my office, I noticed that the committee reviews broadcast services, but I hadn't seen that they have done an annual review in some time. So I thought that was something that we should pursue.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Okay. Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It is in the mandate of the committee that, at least on an annual basis, they review the broadcast television system and the guidelines. The last time we did the review was in May 2008. We had a meeting on May 28, 2008, and then we had another meeting on June 11, 2008, because we had some follow-up issues.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Ms. Jones.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So we're a little behind. We should be setting that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Okay. Other views of members of the committee? Mr. Levac.

Mr. Dave Levac: Well, it was a question. Is it a request?

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes, it is a request.

Mr. Dave Levac: So I think that in terms of June 2 and where we are right now, I would rather leave that for the next Parliament.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: What? We're supposed to do it annually.

Mr. Steve Clark: I think it's in the standing orders, the way I read the package.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Can we get a clarification as to how it reads in the standing orders?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Standing order 108 says the committee is to “act as an advisory body to the Speaker and the House on the television broadcast system and to conduct reviews, at least on an annual basis, of the televising of the legislative proceedings and of the guidelines established by the House with respect to the television broadcast system.”

That's in its mandate, so it's up to the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): It says, “at least on an annual basis.”

Mr. Michael Prue: Can I ask a question here?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I am mindful of the end of May. I don't think we're coming back, quite frankly, after the long weekend, the May 24 long weekend. I will be shocked if the government returns. Having said that, how much business do we have still before the committee that has to be resolved by then?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): We have some private members' public bills that are before the committee, but otherwise, that's it.

Mr. Michael Prue: That's it? Okay. I don't have any problem with the motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Mr. Levac?

Mr. Dave Levac: I boldly try not to make assumptions, but in this case, I would assume that government business would be forthcoming. As it does, it always takes precedence, anyway. I am concerned about filling the docket and not having access to the committee, so my original comment stands.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: But the reality is the docket is empty, and we do have a responsibility, as the Legislative Assembly committee, to do some of these reviews. The last annual review was done in 2008. We're now in 2011.

Quite frankly, I think we're behind on our responsibilities and we should, since we do have the opportunity—we are scheduled to meet every Wednesday—begin next week with this review.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Any other comments on this? Mr. Johnson?

Mr. Rick Johnson: Just a question on timelines for something like this. I'm new to this, and I'm subbing, so it's an information piece. What's involved in a review of this, from staff, and how much time?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Normally, we invite the director of broadcast and recording and the Clerk to come and give us a briefing on the television of the Legislature and the guidelines, and then the committee goes from there. It's just an invitation. That doesn't take us long to do—it's just based on their availability—and then the committee decides, after they've heard the briefing, what they want to do.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Mr. Levac.

Mr. Dave Levac: When you say it goes from there, what does that usually entail, when you said that in 2008—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): We had just two meetings.

Mr. Dave Levac: So it took two meetings after the May 8 review?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): No, it took two meetings, including May 8. So May 8, we had the briefing. There were some concerns that were raised, and we asked for follow-up from the Clerk, and the Clerk came back in June and provided that information. Then the committee was satisfied.

Mr. Dave Levac: And then the committee what?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Was satisfied. They had completed their review.

Mr. Dave Levac: Was satisfied, meaning, "Thank you for telling us what this function is," no recommendations, no discussions—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Well, they didn't actually look at the guidelines during that review. They really based it on—they looked into the fact that the parliamentary channel wasn't carried on the satellite feeds and it wasn't carried on certain digital channels. So that's what they looked into, and they looked into the advice, giving a letter to the CRTC to get us on those channels. That's the focus—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So there was some action?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Yes. The Clerk came back and gave an update and had said that they were writing a letter.

Mr. Dave Levac: Okay. In continuation, my question to the mover, then, Steve, is if you've noticed anything, or is this just for the sake of reviewing it?

Mr. Steve Clark: I think it's two things. I do believe that it's a requirement in our statute that we do have the review. Certainly I think some of those issues that the committee dealt with at their last meeting about broad-

cast at the Legislative Assembly are still valid. Since that time, in reviewing what other legislative assemblies do for some of their committee hearings—some of their committee hearings are streamed live on the Internet—I think there are some things that we can discuss to have better access to our proceedings here, both in committee and in the Legislative Assembly, available online. So just as an issue, those are two that I can think of just like that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Tonia, you were saying that out of the last time that they did it, in 2008, actually what happened was that a letter went forward to the CRTC to ask that these things be put on satellite? Is that what you said?

Mr. Peter Sibenik: If I can be of some assistance here—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Certainly, Peter.

Mr. Peter Sibenik:—this is an issue that has been of particular interest to Mr. Delaney. You may recall that back in 2008, he introduced a private member's motion on the issue of the dropping of the television signal of the legislative proceedings by Star Choice, so he introduced that motion, and I believe it did carry. I'd have to refresh my memory on that.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My thought is—because that's exactly the issue I have in my riding, and I'm sure you do too, Steve. My constituents don't see it. There's no cable; it is all satellite. It was on satellite at one time, and then, as you say, in 2008, it was dropped.

I'm not disputing—I'm just wondering if there is any point in even trying. Can we force companies like Star Choice—I think they're Shaw now—to do anything like that?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The CRTC can.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But can we force the CRTC to then, in turn—I'm just questioning the value of the time spent here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think we're looking at it far too narrowly. That was the issue then; that may not be the issue now.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: It's still the issue for some of us.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is still an issue, but in three years, there could have been a great many other developments of which we are unaware. I would very much like to have two people, the Clerk and somebody from broadcast, come here and explain to us what problems, if any, they are encountering. If that's still a problem and ongoing, I don't have any objections to rewriting the letter, but there could be other things. I don't want to narrow it just to that one issue, and I don't really see any difficulty. We have six sessional weeks, as far as I can think, maybe seven, before the end. If we have one day for hearing them and potentially another day for making recommendations, that still leaves us four or five Wednesdays on which to do other business.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): The clerk points out that there are television guidelines that exist in the standing orders, as I understand, so they could also be reviewed.

I do have a question as well. I'm hearing that there was a letter sent to the CRTC pursuant to the work that was done in May 2008. Do we know, Clerk, if we ever heard back from the CRTC? Did they ever respond to the concerns raised by the committee?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): I'm not sure. I'd have to go and find out that information. I know that at the last meeting, the Clerk agreed that the Speaker and the Clerk would send a letter to the CRTC. I'd have to check on the follow-up on that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Ms. Albanese.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I think that's important to find out, to see if the CRTC provided an answer or not and if there was any further action.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): If there was any follow-up on that.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Any follow-up. I don't think anyone was called—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Any other points, discussions?

Mr. Clark, I don't know if you put forward a motion or you just made a request. Maybe you might want to—

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, because this is my first meeting, when I read the orders that part of our mandate would be to have an annual review, and the fact that we have not had a review for some years, if a motion is required, I would certainly move that, pursuant to our committee's terms of reference, we have a meeting with broadcast services as part of that annual review.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Okay. We have a motion from Mr. Clark. I will call the vote. Does everybody agree?

Mr. Dave Levac: To call the vote? Go ahead and call the vote.

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Okay. Those in favour? Opposed? I see three to two. Motion carried.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Can we talk about some of the modalities around this? When do you want to meet and, I guess, have our first witnesses come—the director of broadcast services?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Just a point of clarification: Are we looking at both the Clerk and the head of broadcast services, as we did in 2008, or just the head of broadcast services?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It's up to the committee.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would suggest, because they work here, that the invitation be made for next week.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): We'll look at the calendar.

Mr. Michael Prue: If I could, on the point of order, is this not the job of the subcommittee and not the full committee?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): It can be done either way.

Mr. Michael Prue: All right.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Next Wednesday is April 6. We can have the Clerk—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tonia Grannum): We'll send an invitation.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): We'll send an invitation inviting the Clerk and the director of broadcasting for next Wednesday.

Mr. Dave Levac: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. I hear clearly what Mr. Prue was saying, and I tend to agree with his observation, whether or not he has changed his mind. I think the subcommittee is struck to make those arrangements; they've always done it. I would prefer that the subcommittee meet to make that decision.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): We're here, so I guess we can make those decisions.

Mr. Steve Clark: Basically, I thought we had just decided that it's going to be April 6. Why can't we just move forward and get it done?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): All right. We will send an invitation to the Clerk and the director of broadcasting to appear before the committee on April 6. We'll hear their submissions and then proceed to discuss further as to the next steps.

Mr. Michael Prue: At what time does this take place? At 1 o'clock?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yasir Naqvi): Yes, 1 o'clock, the regular time for the meeting.

Any other business? Great. Thank you very much. Meeting adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1314.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 30 March 2011

Organization	M-171
Committee business.....	M-171

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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