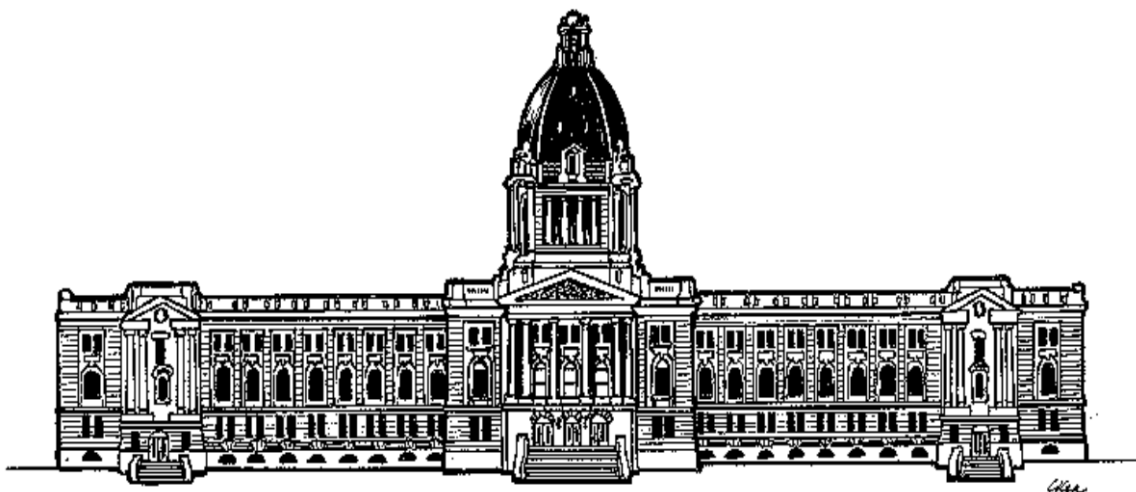




STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

Mr. Greg Brkich, Chair
Arm River

Mr. Doyle Vermette, Deputy Chair
Cumberland

Ms. Nancy Heppner
Martensville-Warman

Ms. Lisa Lambert
Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood

Mr. Eric Olauson
Saskatoon University

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

Mr. Warren Steinley
Regina Walsh Acres

[The committee met at 17:10.]

The Chair: — I want to welcome and thank everybody for coming today: myself, Chair, Greg Brkich; Nancy Heppner; Lisa Lambert; Eric Olauson; Doug Steele; and Warren Steinley committee members. And I see a substitution. David Forbes is substituting for Doyle Vermette.

I will advise the committee that pursuant to rule 148(1), the estimates and March supplementary estimates for the following ministries and agencies were committed to the committee on March 30th, 2017 and on March 22nd, 2017 respectively. They are vote 30, Government Relations; vote 3, Justice; vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport; and vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan.

Today the committee will be considering Bill No. 47, *An Act to Reduce Salaries of Members of the Legislative Assembly, 2017*. We'll begin our consideration of the bill today with clause 1, short title. I will ask Minister Harrison if he wants to introduce any officials, and if he has any opening comments to make them now. Minister Harrison.

Bill No. 47 — *An Act to Reduce Salaries of Members of the Legislative Assembly, 2017/Loi de 2017 réduisant les traitements à verser aux membres de l'Assemblée législative*

Clause 1

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Sure. Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do have some opening comments. As far as officials go, you're going to have to just have me here today. The bill was put together by Justice, but on my direction in terms of the content. So it's an unusual circumstance in that we don't actually have a ministry that's responsible for the statute, which I hope to explain a little bit as to why that's unusual. But I would just by way of preface say it's unfortunate we have to be here. This is a matter that should have been dealt with at the Board of Internal Economy. And what this is, for those watching I mean, this is an Act to reduce members' salaries. That's what this does, and it reduces certain other amounts, the 10 per cent for the political offices of the government and opposition.

So the way this would have traditionally worked, and has worked for many, many years if not decades in this building, is that these sort of matters would be dealt with by the Board of Internal Economy, which operates on a consensus basis. It's a 4 to 2 statutory body, which is unusual and different from most standing committees like this one where a majority constitutes quorum. There's separate rules which are written down in statute, so you know, it's a different instrument.

But these matters, you know, should have been dealt with at the board. The fact that they weren't is because the opposition wouldn't show up at the board. There were a number of meetings that were scheduled to deal with this matter. And I know members are going to have comments on that, and that's fair, but that's why we're here. The government had to actually introduce a statute to reduce the salaries, which we had announced was going to be the intention of executive government some time ago by 3.5 per cent and by the caucus office — which, as I said, is the political office for each side —

by 10 per cent.

So you know, I would prefer not to be here. I know that, you know, we have hon. members here who I have a lot of respect for and who we work with across the floor and have for many years. That all being said, this is political and this is politics. And that's where we're at.

But what I wanted to put on the record because I know that there are going to arguments made by the opposition, and I would expect that there would be not just arguments, but perhaps amendments put forward as well, which again is fair ball in terms of the reduction that, you know, this government has taken with regard to the political cost of government versus the final year of the last year of the NDP [New Democratic Party] government.

So you know, I wanted to be fair in this. So we're looking at the comparison: '06-07 would've been the last full year of NDP government. There was '07-08, but that was a bit of a mixture, and that was an election year, and the Saskatchewan Party took over midway through that year as government.

[17:15]

So I would just point to the reduction in Executive Council, which again for members or for individuals who are watching, Executive Council is the Premier's office essentially, although there's an east wing and a west wing, as we call it, which is a civil service side and a political side. So I'm just referring to the political side of Executive Council.

So there has been significant reduction, as far as political staff in this building, from that last full year of NDP government in '06-07. There's 52 fewer political staff in the building than there were at that time, 29 per cent less than the NDP; \$365,000 less per month in salaries on the political front, 30 per cent reduction from the last year of the NDP; political salaries in this government are \$4 million per year less than under the NDP; 25 less staff in Executive Council. And there are some that include . . . [inaudible] . . . or represent that there's been an increase, but that's Intergovernmental Affairs, which under the NDP had been separated from Executive Council. It's been brought in, made a part of EC [Executive Council], so that's not a fair comparison. So significant reduction: minister's office is 27 less staff, salaries down very significantly.

And as far as trips, as far as travel which, you know, we might hear a bit about in the meeting, the last year of NDP government, '06-07, number of out-of-province trips, 131. This year — and these are new numbers; actually we just got these in the last day since the fiscal year just ended, '16-17 — 44 trips, 67 per cent fewer out of province trips under this government than under the NDP. The costs of that travel, under the NDP, \$264,000; under our government last year, \$74,600 — 72 per cent less cost on out-of-province travel.

For total travel, last year of NDP government, \$975,000; '16-17, our government, \$344,000 — 65 per cent less. Executive air, the last year of NDP government, \$509,000 in expenditure; last year for our government, \$104,000. And in addition to that, we're going to be winding down the airline and

selling the aircraft for an additional 700,000 to a million dollars of savings per year. So executive air usage down 80 per cent year over year.

You know, there were individual ministers in the NDP government in the last year of NDP government that spent more than the entire cabinet of our government. In the last year of NDP government, my predecessor from Meadow Lake — and I think he'd been minister of Industry at that point which was an equivalent position that I hold now — he spent \$110,000 on executive air travel in that last year of government. The member for Athabasca — a continuing member, deputy leader, Mr. Belanger — \$122,000 in '06-07. More than the entire amount we spent on executive air, he spent that and more in '06-07. And actually in '04-05 he spent even more than that; that was 124,000 he spent that year.

So I point all this out to show and to make the factual argument that this government has spent significantly less on political costs, well over 50 per cent plus less cost than under the NDP. When you look at the political cost of staff, you look at the cost of travel, there's been a very remarkable reduction.

So I know there's going to be arguments advanced, which we've heard from the opposition with regard to, you know, ministers should take an additional 20 per cent reduction. The cost in ministerial expenses is down, is down very, very significantly over the last number of years.

We're going to hear about a five-MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] reduction, which they advanced in the last campaign and spent significant amounts of political oxygen on, advancing that position for years previous. You know, obviously the public, I think, made their determination with respect to that.

I would add though, as far as reduction to cost of MLAs, we've reduced the budget of the LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] significantly. And again, it was a bit of co-operative effort that was done through what should be the method we're doing it right now, through the Board of Internal Economy, working with officials from the Legislative Assembly Service.

There was a reduction last year. There's an over 5 per cent reduction this year as well. So a significant cost savings to the taxpayer by reducing the . . . then this is all cumulative with the reductions in other ministerial expenses. So you know, I get the politics of it, Mr. Speaker. I think there would be some out there that would think if, as politicians, we got paid 10 bucks, it would be 10 bucks too much. But you know, I think that there is a reasonable position on this and, you know, I think we've worked co-operatively in this regard in the past. It's unfortunate that we're here dealing with this right now, but I'm happy to respond to questions or comments or proposed amendments or whatever we might be getting from the official opposition.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Any questions? Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, and I appreciate the minister's comments. And some have spurred some questions, and some I think I'll just leave as they are because we have debated some of these points. And I would take exception to,

we "wouldn't show up." We attended two meetings, two board meetings that dealt with wages. This would have been the third one. And so the question was really, when would the government get its act together? We met in December. We met in January. Here the night before we hear that we're going to be called to a meeting.

So there is some question mark about that, and I think that it really is unfortunate. It's a sad situation for the Board of Internal Economy. And as the minister would know that when board meetings have been held in the past, when we've hired . . . I think we've hired four officers of the legislature in a very co-operative, productive manner. It was because a lot of the relationship building that happened behind the scenes that we all knew what was going to happen at the meeting. That had gone off the rails in the last few months because there were many surprises at the board meeting that we just weren't aware or didn't think would be happening in the way that it did.

So we have a very different version, a different view of how the board was being used towards the end. And unfortunately I think of it . . . hopefully it's not the end. Hopefully we can rebuild that relationship.

But we look at the bill before us, Bill 47. It's much more than just a simple wage cut of 3.5. And we understand and appreciate the government has the ability and the power to make that decision, but some of these things are overreaching their power. And to that end, Mr. Chair, I would like to read into the record some comments and ask the member and some of the members of the committee and the minister if they have comments on those. Because we have really strayed quite a distance from what kind of legislature we have here, where the government thinks it can override or power through decisions that should have been made in the style that we have been used to, with conversation and compromise and working through that way.

The first one I would read, and this is something . . . It was interesting when we first got into opposition in '07, I asked the library to do some work. So what is the role of the opposition? I don't really understand it, not having been in it actually myself, having sat a few years in government. And this is *The Opposition in a Parliamentary System*.

I think we need to step back and think about . . . How does this bill, what does it do? It's more than just simply a 3.5 wage cut amongst us all. We all agreed to that. We all know that. But this, when we get into cutting the government caucus and the opposition caucus, we're starting to get into some areas where this is very thin ice in terms of democracy in action.

And I would correct the minister when he says the board is made up of four on the government side and two on the opposition side. He should know that actually it's two cabinet ministers, two private members, and two opposition members. It's two, two, two — three sets of two. Any one of those sets of two who don't show up . . . If cabinet doesn't show up, the board doesn't operate. If the private members from the government side don't show up, it doesn't operate. If the opposition doesn't show up, those two, it doesn't operate. It's not that it's all the opposition's power. It's a very important balance of relationship that was set up in the board. To

understand, the backbenchers on the government side play a significant role in support of Executive Council. And we know that to be true. If a government loses a confidence vote, it's not usually the opposition. It's the backbenchers on the government say it's gone too far.

But this is one I want to read into the record. I've got a couple, I think, thoughtful quotes. The first one is *The Opposition in a Parliamentary System*. And this was written in 1988 by Gerald Schmitz. And I'll leave this with Hansard so you have a record, and you can make sense of what I would say here. But I want to quote first of all:

“Government and Opposition in Parliamentary Democracies”

The division between government and opposition is as old as political democracy itself.

Talks about Aristotle, and how the essence of self-government was the citizens were in turn both rulers and ruled, and how it evolved through the age of mass politics and in the development of representative systems and periodic elections. And this is what I want to quote and get it on the record, and I think all members of the committee should be thinking about this:

What has not changed, however, in our modern liberal-democratic society is the hallowed principle that government must rest on the consent of the governed — which means, inter alia, that the minority accepts the right of the majority to make decisions [and we do], provided that there is reciprocal respect for the minority's right to dissent from those decisions and to promote alternative . . . [And we have done that.] With the advent of representative and responsible parliamentary government, the distinction between “government” and “opposition” has become more formalized and . . . [become routine], but the underlying principles have not changed.

And I think this is what we're seeing, the problem right now. The conversation between the government and the opposition has not worked because there has been a lack of respect for our ability to dissent. And that's really, really important. We do have some opinions and we do have some solutions. The situation the government has created and we have found ourselves in, we all need to be helping out and working through this. But the government has played politics with this unfortunately.

Now I just want to read one further quote which is interesting and you might find this interesting, Mr. Chair:

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Member of Parliament who went beyond presenting private, local and special grievances or bills, to oppose the Crown, or even to debate such national issues as the right of succession, foreign policy and religion, risked imprisonment or worse. Of this period the historian Macaulay commented:

. . . every man who then meddled with public affairs took his life in his hand . . . It was, we seriously believe, as safe to be a highwayman as to be a distinguished leader of the opposition.

And we find that here, where if you're in opposition, you're sure not popular, and we're not taken very seriously. And I think there's a point where you say enough is enough. We've gone to two meetings about wages. When will this government have its act together? What will we find out in surprise? So we come to the third one. We say, okay, 3.5. Is there a fourth one? Is there a fifth one? And we say, when will you get your act together, government? The budget's coming. Let's see the budget, then we can have our meeting, and we can go from there.

And so, Mr. Chair, I think what I really want to do is make . . . There are four key points that I want make and leave with the members and with people at home.

[17:30]

That this bill, Bill 47, overreaches because it punishes the opposition. And that's a key part of democratic government as we know it. It's not just the 3.5 wage rollback, which we accept. We accept that government has the right to make that decision. But the 10 per cent cut to caucuses really goes beyond, and the amount of money that's involved really does look like it's a punishment and not a solution. This is not a solution. You know, the minister rolled off a series of stats such as travel and this and that and the next thing. What is the amount that we're talking about in terms of caucus grants? It doesn't come close to that. It's just a plain punishment to the opposition for standing up for its right to dissent and to demand respect.

Secondly, the bill really underachieves and is a severe disappointment, I think, to the public, to the opposition, anybody who's been watching. That in fact the mess that we find ourselves, 1.2, \$1.3 billion deficit, the people who made those decisions are not being held accountable and in fact are getting off pretty easily. For the pain that's being meted out through the budget, this cabinet is getting off relatively easy. It's getting the same cut as everybody else. And I know and if I don't have the respect for the minister and his numbers where he portrayed their cut as 49 per cent and how we should somehow be in awe of the cabinet ministers taking a 49 per cent . . . Now the key word is “more”, not a 49 per cent cut because they didn't take a 49 per cent cut. They took a 49 per cent more than others even though it's because they do earn six figures. They do earn six figures, and they will keep on earning six figures.

Mr. Chair, we also have a key point I want to leave with the minister and the members here is we did have a solution. We often hear in the House, particularly from the Minister of Finance, we have no solutions. We have no solutions, you know. And the minister can make light of our suggestion that we do take a look at how we are governed, you know. And often SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] is pointed out as being overgoverned. I actually come to their defence and say, you know, if you want to look at somebody who is even more overgoverned, look at the MLAs in this province.

And it was interesting, and I think many of you would have seen the graph. The Minister of Education had a graph to show how we have too many libraries in this province, too many

libraries. So the librarians got together. This is from a tweet from them they're posting on Facebook, that we have too many MLAs. And really, seriously, when you look at how we compare to Alberta and Manitoba: Alberta MLAs, they represent over 45,000 people; BC [British Columbia], it's over 65,000; Ontario, you're getting into 125,000. We're in the 16,000. It's indefensible. It's indefensible when you're asking people . . . when you're cutting STC [Saskatchewan Transportation Company], when you're cutting libraries, that we aren't even willing to have that conversation. We aren't even willing to have that conversation.

I accept that we ran on that, and we weren't very successful. But I do have to point out, Mr. Chair, that this government ran in 2011 and didn't mention at all that they were going to increase the number of MLAs by three but turned around right away after the election — similar fashion to what we're seeing happening this time with broken promises — right after the election brought out the idea of three more MLAs. They didn't tell anybody about that at the time. That might have been a bit of a game changer or maybe not. But we think the people of Saskatchewan are thinking about this. We know the librarians are thinking about this because this information came from them.

And I do want to reflect on the sad situation for the Board of Internal Economy. It is, it is an institution of how we govern this legislature, and it's a very fragile thing. And as I said, there's three sets of pairs that make it happen, and if we don't, if we don't guard that institution then we're in for tough times.

We fortunately have gone through hiring the officers. And we've even been very open, and we've taken some risks on some of the officers we've hired, particularly when it comes to their political backgrounds. And we've taken them at their word when they've said they can be non-partisan. We said, okay, we're going to give you a shot. We're okay with that. We can rise above the partisan element of this. We've been there, we've been there for the greater good. But I have to say this government is using and wants to use the board as a rubber stamp, and we refuse to have the board used as a rubber stamp. It's much more important than any one of our parties.

And that's why it's important that we really value that, and we value the relationship that makes it work, makes it work, which may mean that we need to sometimes slow down, bring everybody along. That wasn't the case . . . We don't know why that on the morning of March 8th, that had to be passed then. Why did the 3.5 per cent cut have to be passed on the morning of March 8th? The minister's never talked about that, never talked about that. Two weeks before the budget was coming out, what was the rush? What was the deal that we had to have it in place? No answer to that. No answer to that. So that makes us really suspicious that the board is becoming a tool of the government to rubber stamp its initiatives. We do understand they have the right and the power to make decisions. Fair enough. But on the other hand, they do have to respect the role of opposition.

So we are really worried about that. We do have some amendments to address some of the key points as we get through. I do have a couple other things that I want to put into the record because I think this is a very important meeting

we're having here. As the minister has alluded to, this has never happened before where we've had this kind of work done. It's usually been done at the board level.

Something else I had got when we had entered opposition, and this was a speech by John Diefenbaker, 1949, October 27th of 1949. And of course the world . . . it was a very interesting time. It was four years after World War II and of course we all know the United Nations was happening. John Diefenbaker was a stout and very strong defender of human rights. In fact what he had done in terms of First Nations and Métis rights, especially around elections, very important. So he's a very, a very . . . And I don't think I have to convince members on the other side of the value of John Diefenbaker and the contributions he's made to politics and in parliamentary procedure in Saskatchewan or in Canada.

So what he says, and I don't plan on reading the whole speech even though it is really worthwhile, and I'll quote different parts of it. It holds that the opposition partly because . . . He says, "I know of no better . . . [name] of the House of Commons than the words used by Jennings in his work on parliament" when he's talking about the role of opposition.

It holds its opposition partly because of its great traditions. It has fought kings and dismissed them. It has raised up an army to destroy a king and was itself destroyed by its army, only to recall another kind and to rise again on the site of its own destruction. It's been modified and reformed to meet the changes of centuries. It's been led by the greatest men that the country has produced — Pitt the Elder and Pitt the Younger, Sir Robert Peel, Disraeli and Gladstone, Lloyd George; it has seen the greatest wits and orators in opposition to each other; it has, above all, achieved the pinnacle of freedom by listening to men like Charles James Fox, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Lloyd George and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and Churchill who dared to be unpopular and, in the cant phrase, "unpatriotic," because they insisted on speaking the truth as they understood it.

If parliament is to be preserved as a living institution, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition must fearlessly perform its functions. When it properly discharges them, the preservation of our freedom is assured. The reading of history proves that freedom always dies when criticism ends. It upholds and maintains the rights of minorities against majorities. It must be vigilant against oppression and unjust invasions by the cabinet of the rights of the people. It should supervise all expenditures and prevent overexpenditures by exposing to the light of public opinion wasteful expenditures or worse. It finds fault; it suggests amendments; it asks questions and elicits information; it arouses, educates and molds public opinion by voice and vote. It must scrutinize every action by the government and in doing so prevents the short-cuts through democratic procedure that governments like to make.

These are important comments. These are really important for us all to reflect on as legislators in very tough times that we find ourselves in. This is no small thing that we reflect back on what Diefenbaker said in 1949. And I quote further:

Parliament is a place where in full discussion freedom is preserved, where one side advances arguments and the other examines them and where decisions are arrived at after passing through the crucible of public discussion.

The Opposition that discharges its responsibilities become the responsible outlet of intelligent criticism. Indeed, most, if not all, authorities on constitutional government agree that Britain's freedom from civil war since the development of the party system is due in main to the fact the Opposition has provided an outlet and a safety-valve for opposition.

And I think that's really key. We make light in the House about how we're four sword lengths apart, but seriously we can see what's happening around the world, and it's because we value the opposition.

He goes on to say:

I am fully aware that parliamentary majorities are not prone to acknowledge the necessity of the opposition — and more so when the opposition fully and competently discharges its constitutional functions. One political writer has expressed the view of the average government in these words:

“The government tends to regard the opposition as the brake on a car going uphill whereas the opposition thinks the car is going downhill.”

So I think, Mr. Speaker . . . Well I just want to also say, Mr. Chair:

It is human nature for governments to find the opposition distasteful and the longer governments are in power the more they become convinced that they govern by divine right and that their decisions are infallible. Only a strong opposition can prevent a cabinet with a commanding majority from ruling without regard to the rights of minorities. Independence is not looked for among most private members supporting the government, for individual independence more often than not denies personal preferment. As for collective independence by the [majorities or the] members supporting the government, the cabinet is master by holding over its majority the threat of dissolution.

And it goes on to say, “The absence of a strong opposition remains a one-party state.”

And I think we all agree that that is something that we really don't want. And while it's humorous to some, this is very serious matters. And I think that while rookie MLAs may think it's a joke to read the words of Diefenbaker, at some point, members, especially rookies, may end up being in opposition, and see how much you have to deal with this kind of stuff. This is very serious stuff, and we think that people in Saskatchewan deserve the respect of all members when it comes to respecting the minorities here in Saskatchewan, because that's what makes Saskatchewan so unique.

Mr. Chair, though, that brings us to today. And I find it very

interesting, I find it very interesting, particularly this minister who has, and the others here around this table, experience in Ottawa, and how the Liberals now, the government in charge, are being called political thugs because of the way they're operating, the way that they're operating and they're changing the rules. Some of the rules may make sense, but the way they're pushing them through is a problem, is a problem.

You know, the Prime Minister wants to be only in the House, I understand, one day a week. And I would say, well what happens to accountability with that and their other changes? So the opposition say their ongoing filibuster is a protest against Liberals' thuggery. And I think that's a real concern. That's a real concern because here we see, at another level, governments who are in a rush to solve what they think are political problems, and not taking the long tried-and-tested solutions through committees that have both sides of the House — all sides of the House — involved. And so, this is something.

And I know the minister has experience in Ottawa, and whether he would side with his Conservative partners and say, well there's an opportunity where you do have to do some things and step up and be counted, even though they don't have the majority. But they have taken a stand, and I think rightfully so, where you need to have the government of the day understand how important it is to bring everybody along when you have challenges. We all know that, whether it's Parliament or legislature, we can all make things work better, and I mean that's actually a really good example.

[17:45]

And, Mr. Chair, you would be around when we, the old ways we used to do things — and the rookies here have no idea — when we would go into June and July and work in the House until midnight or 2 in the morning. You remember those days. And so I look at this, the table here; I think you, myself, and the member back here would be the only ones who were from that era. But how we can work to make things work better when we do respect each other, and that has gone off the rails.

So with that, I do have some, you know, specific questions. But I do want to ask the minister, or if the members at all want to jump in, because I have put some things on the record and if they have some comments, be very happy to hear.

The Chair: — Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank my friend and colleague for, you know, obviously thoughtful arguments. He's put significant effort into this and I appreciate it. And I have to say, I think some were a bit overwrought and maybe I'll address those. But I do acknowledge, you know, the thought that has been put into the submission. You know, one observation I'd make, just kind of slightly humorous of, you know, Prime Minister Diefenbaker being quoted by a New Democrat. I think both Prime Minister Diefenbaker and Premier Douglas would probably both find that slightly, find that interesting. I'll just put it that way.

But as far as the, you know, overwrought part of this . . . And I don't take the arguments lightly with respect to the role of opposition. I've been in opposition. I served in opposition. It

wasn't for a long time but I served in opposition in Ottawa and I think that, you know, the member makes valid points about the importance of an effective opposition, what tools to be able to, you know, not necessarily get its way but be able to, you know, have your say most definitely. And even to have the tools to delay government from moving in a direction it would want, I guess this is probably, you know, could be an expression of that. So I do appreciate that and I accept the argument as well. I mean, the roles . . .

And I think sometimes governments fall into the thought that, well if we just have to get this done right now and, you know, who cares about the future. Well my colleagues can tell you I say, you know, we are going to be in opposition again. And that's why we have to be mindful of what might be expedient today is not the best policy for the long term and, as importantly, not the best thing for the institution, which I think . . . And I know the member has a great deal of respect for the institution, as does the Opposition House Leader and as do I.

This is a wonderful, wonderful institution that we have. And you know, you referenced as well the goings-on in Ottawa, and you know during the time I served there, I had seen some genuine overreaches. And I think we are seeing that right now again. The member would remember motion 6, which was put on the order paper in Ottawa. That would have been a year ago or so now, but that was a genuinely anti-democratic series of changes to the standing orders in Ottawa that really would have been catastrophic to how the institution functioned.

And I would say, having been in both places, this institution functions a lot more functional than the House of Commons in Ottawa, you know, and we have seen that at procedure and house affairs. There was a report that had been issued by the majority, I think it was last week, but they've had basically a three-day . . . there was a three-day filibuster at committee. I think the government has kind of backed away from some of it.

And I would agree, there's some of it that is interesting in there, the idea of having a . . . And I would, I don't know if I would necessarily disagree, but I would say that there's a case to be made with regard to the first minister appearing for one day. They do that in the UK [United Kingdom]. I'm not saying that I think that's necessarily the best way of doing it, but there is a case for that.

And then there's other days, the way they structure it at Westminster, where other ministers — kind of based on policy field — would be there to answer questions for members. And there's reasons for that, partly the fact that the Chamber is about the same size as ours, and they have 635 members, in which they can't all fit. Their standing orders at Westminster are . . . ours are modelled to some extent but have been evolved over the years, but initially were modelled on Westminster's, although theirs have evolved over the years as well.

But you know, as far as . . . I would take some issue with kind of the comparison to, you know, parliaments, particularly parliaments during the transition period, you know, before the *Act of Settlement* and afterwards in the United Kingdom, where it really was a kind of taking your life into your hands sort of decision to dissent from the position of the Crown. And you know, there had been obviously a very long evolution from

1215, you know, through the *Act of Settlement*, and a number of very important debates and occurrences and events in that interim period of time, which still have kind of vestigial sort of impacts on how we do things around here, I think.

You know, one pretty well-known one, at least amongst members, is when the Speaker is newly elected, a struggle on the way up. And I mean that's kind of a vestigial element of, you know, a number of speakers unfortunately having lost their head for disagreeing with the King and supporting the rights of parliament. So I understand that.

You know, what we were talking about here though . . . And again with respect to the board, you know the way that our institutions have been governed, this was a relatively recent phenomenon having a statutory authority that . . . a statutory created committee overseeing the operations of the Legislative Assembly. And that had been kind of a tradition coming . . . It's not a tradition; it's a relatively new development. Westminster, I think, was the first that did it, and I forget what it's called. It's the commission of the House of Commons or something like that. It had been a committee of the House that had actually governed these things prior to that, and there'd been reasons why they ended up doing it this way. And a lot of Westminster parliaments ended up following after that so that we have a board structure. And the member rightly points out two, two, and two. It's exactly structured that way for a reason.

But kind of what I'm getting at here with talking about the board is, you know, I would agree with the member that we've had a very productive and a good working arrangement at the board over the course of the last decade. I mean I wasn't here before that and I'm not sure if the member was served on the board before that or not. But I mean, yes, we have to operate on a . . . You know, it's a consensus-based organization and we've had some, I think, pretty good consensus and moved forward with standing order revisions, director reviews. Standing orders were done through House Services Committee but same idea.

So you know, we've made a lot of progress here and I think had, despite what people see in question period, this is a pretty collaborative place. It has to be a pretty collaborative place for it to work properly. And it is much more collaborative than the House of Commons in Ottawa, which is a different animal right now particularly. So I do get that, but you know, kind of comparing what we're going through right now to some of the really genuinely challenging periods of parliamentary development is a little bit of a stretch. That being said, I do take the member's argument as offered in good faith.

Again for those watching, the actual dollar figures we're talking about here, and I think we're having more of a kind of, theoretical isn't the right word because this is important, but a discussion around how, you know, the institution should work and whatnot. But the actual dollar figure we're talking about, the reduction for the caucus office provisions particularly is 126,000 reduction for the Saskatchewan Party caucus office and a \$64,000 reduction for the opposition caucus office.

So I don't think we're threatening the future of democracy with this. So I would say that. But you know, I think this has been a good discussion. I appreciate the member's thoughts. I would disagree with the level to which he would be making them but,

like I said, I think that they're offered in good faith.

The government's committed to continuing to work, and I know there's politics involved in this. I get this. I think everybody gets that. But you know, I think the foundation is there to continue working in an appropriate way going forward on matters that are important. And the board will continue to hopefully function well in the future after we have this bill passed.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Well thank you very much. And yes, it is sometimes, but you know, I think we all should look across, when we have strong parliamentarians like Diefenbaker, we should reflect back on that. And I don't think . . . And I have to give a shout out to my mom who was a big fan of John Diefenbaker. And I think they were both in the Prince Albert area, so I was sort of raised with that respect.

And I do have to say that at some point I want to thank the library for the research here because it's hugely important and that we reflect back on these things. And while my quote about the highway man, I found that more interesting. But I do think that every once in a while, we do have to step back and think, how did we arrive here? How did we get to having the democracy that we have? And I didn't bring this book along, Mr. Minister, but if you do get a chance to read *Return of History*, the Massey lectures, actually written by a Métis woman here from Regina who teaches in Europe now, very interesting, the rise and fall of democracy around the world.

And we often, and I think we all share frustrations at our voter turnout because people think we have it so good in Canada. But it's a very fragile thing. It's a hugely fragile thing. And so I don't want to overstate it, but I think we take our role in opposition very seriously. When we boycott a meeting, it's a very serious thing. We don't take that lightly. We've never . . . I've not heard of that before where opposition has boycotted a meeting, in my time here anyways. But that's, you know, that may be wrong.

Two points, I do want to get into some technical stuff and then we will get into this. And I don't want to debate this too much, but clearly you alluded to your predecessor, Maynard Sonntag, and the flying that he did. And we've never really thought or we've never really dealt into the comparison of the transportation because I know you pick up on the air costs, but we don't know about the mileage costs. And what would be your comparison of yourself compared to Maynard? And I don't know what it is.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes, I can offer that.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Is it less?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes. Yes, I can . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Let's hear it then.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Sure. Now if I can . . . Yes, I'll put it on the record. No, I appreciate that. My totals for last year were 20,326 and Maynard's were 110,476, flying.

Mr. Forbes: — For driving mileage?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — That's my total, 20,000.

Mr. Forbes: — No, but for mileage, vehicle mileage.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — That's just exec air. That doesn't even count mileage for Mr. Sonntag's . . .

Mr. Forbes: — No, I know. But I'm talking about mileage, as in vehicle ground mileage.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Well that's all of it. That's my mileage and exec air.

Mr. Forbes: — But I don't want to know . . . So yours is 20,000. Sonntag's is 110.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes, just for air.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, what is his ground mileage?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — It would be in addition. I don't have that in front of me.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay that's, so that's what I'm saying, that we're seeing different changes. When we were in government, we were not allowed to have our private vehicles if you were in cabinet. If . . .

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Right, you had to take your CVA [central vehicle agency], right?

Mr. Forbes: — We would have CVAs.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — I understand that's not a practice with this current government. Is that right? You can have your own private vehicle.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Right, and I just, I use my private vehicle. I don't have a CVA. I did for . . . When I was first the minister, I had it for about two or three months and then I just used my private vehicle.

Mr. Forbes: — So we don't know what that change, impact of that would be.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Well this includes though, Mr. Forbes, the mileage cost that would . . . I think it's billed at the same rate that the civil service should be, right? So you keep track of your mileage for your private vehicle. You then submit the number of kilometres and you're reimbursed at the same rate as the public service, which is all added into that total for ministers. So in addition to exec air . . . And I don't think I've taken exec air in two years, so . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, my point is apples to apples, oranges to oranges. So exec air, the exec air cost . . .

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — So apples to apples, my 20,000 and Maynard's 110. His 110 would be higher than that.

[18:00]

Mr. Forbes: — But I'm talking ground mileage. Like that, just that, just that. What did Maynard charge for mileage on a personal vehicle, and what are you charging? I don't know what the answer is to that.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — I don't know what you're getting at, though. Like, the . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Well, I'm getting at, there's different ways of having costs.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes, but we're accounting for all the costs in this. Like, all of my costs are accounted for in the 20,600 figure — all of them.

Mr. Forbes: — I get that. I get the total costs of travel, I think.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — No, that's not . . .

Mr. Forbes: — But I'm not sure that's coming through. So that's out there. We disagree.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Well, no, it's not out there. I'm explaining it to you.

The Chair: — Can I cut in for a minute? I'll ask . . . one question, one answer, and go through the Chair, as it's starting to turn into a tabletop discussion here. So one question.

Mr. Forbes: — Well my point is that I'm not here to debate all the stats that the minister has provided. That wasn't my intent. My intent, though, because he brought an array of numbers, to show how some may not quite fully represent what the public would find. Now he may be giving the total numbers for travel costs, and that's fair enough. I'd have to take a closer look.

But what I do want to just put on the record, Mr. Chair, is that we're seeing a different type of thing happening when the NDP were in government, when ministers were not allowed to claim mileage. They had CVAs, central vehicle agency, so they were CVs [central vehicle], I guess. So it's a different thing, what I'm saying.

Now if the minister wants to add a point of clarification to that, he can. I'm just saying there are some differences between how the two regimes operated.

The Chair: — Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Yes, I've been trying to explain this. These are apples-to-apples numbers. The cost for mileage being incurred, whether it be, you know, in a CVA . . . I mean I guess it's slightly . . . I'm not sure if it's calculated any differently. The cost incurred to government, you know, we're reimbursed at the same rate as the civil service for using a private vehicle.

And I think most people would see that as being probably a good thing that you're not using a government vehicle, that you would use your own truck, that you would do it that way as opposed to, you know, driving around in a government vehicle. And it saves money doing it that way too. I'm not getting . . . I

mean, the taxpayer isn't incurring the capital cost of a new vehicle, because I'm driving my own truck.

So there's that. So I would just say these are apples to apples. My cost versus my predecessor's are about, you know, like a quarter or less, a fifth of what his were. Actually less than a fifth of what his were.

Mr. Forbes: — On a different topic, on the number of MLAs we have, and you alluded to the fact that through Legislative Services we were able to accrue some savings and that there is . . . You know, we could get into those numbers too. But clearly we all know that each MLA does accrue a real cost. And if that MLA wasn't there, there would be a savings. There's no MLA here who's working on thin air. Everyone has a cost. Would you agree to that?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — No, I mean there's obviously a cost associated with each MLA, which is why we found offsetting reductions in other parts of the LAS. But I mean, one of the challenges I have with this argument . . . and I know you've advanced this argument consistently, and that's fair, and advanced it during the campaign as well. Like, there's going to be no cost . . . even if this was accepted, there would be no cost savings realized for four years. You know, we're not going to kick three MLAs out of the Assembly who were duly elected in their constituency. Unless I'm missing that part of the argument, I don't think that's what you're advocating. But there's no cost savings to be realized on this front for four years. So I would put that out there. And maybe you can clarify if it's your intention to have three MLAs removed from the Assembly. I think there would be significant questions, legal and otherwise, if not constitutional, around that as well.

Mr. Forbes: — The other thing . . . Do you feel we have the appropriate number, the balance right now compared to what other places have in terms of the number of MLAs? Now we do know that the public is receiving more and more information about the state of affairs in Saskatchewan vis-à-vis the government financial picture that they didn't have a year ago today on election day. We know they didn't have all that information, and now they do have much more. They have a more accurate picture. I don't know if it's a totally accurate picture yet. So some of the things that they thought weren't so critical, now are.

But I guess my question, in light of librarians for example and other groups, saying that there are too many MLAs, is the government at all willing to have a discussion in the long term about how we can make this legislature more sustainable?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Well look, my view is that we have an appropriate number of MLAs. We had significant debate around this. We had, you know, a bill in the Assembly. We had an election where this was an issue. The other thing I would point out, and I know what your position is now, but when that bill was introduced it was supported by the New Democrats. The Deputy Leader of the NDP gave an entire speech saying that this was absolutely appropriate. And I realize that that position has since changed, but that's a fact. I mean, I could read you the *Hansard* quotes. I'm not going to go through it, but Mr. Belanger gave an entire speech not just saying that this was okay, but saying this was absolutely appropriate and a good

thing.

Mr. Forbes: — We know the history of that speech. And that was a second reading speech, and it is interesting you should bring that up. And Mr. Belanger has spoken to clarify his comments since then. But as well, I mean we can talk about the comments you folks have made about STC, how it was safe and never would be sold, and I think that was just a year ago. Jennifer Campeau, the minister responsible, had been quoted saying it's safe. But according to your side, things change.

So now when you say that you think we have an appropriate number of MLAs, is that something that you think, that's the government position and that will be one into quite the distant future?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Absolutely. Yes, that is the government position. That's going to continue to be the government position. And the opposition are obviously free to put forward alternative views on this in an election campaign as they did last election campaign, and have the people make their decision.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. Well we think this is something we should always constantly monitor, particularly in light of what's happening across the country and the changes that have been made in light of challenging financial times.

The other issue that we have made is that somehow this government has not been at all remorseful or held any sort of . . . had accepted any kind of role in the mismanagement of the budget over the past decade, and that we have found ourselves in this situation, and in fact that they will be . . . there is no penalty for what they've . . . where they have found us. But yet we're asking, you know, we see the cleaning staff being privatized; we see vulnerable workers who are paying a huge price for the mismanagement of what's happened here in Saskatchewan. Do you at all feel that this government, this cabinet should take some responsibility?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Well the question from the member is . . . I would absolutely categorically reject the premise of the question that this was . . . a \$1.2 billion reduction in government revenue had anything to do with cabinet decision making. This had everything to do with a global collapse in commodity prices — energy, oil, uranium, potash. That's why we have a \$1.2 billion shortfall in revenue. It had nothing to do with the management.

And you know, I would advance this. I never heard from any member of the opposition over the course of the last, you know, two or three budget cycles saying that they believe there was going to be a global collapse in commodity prices. I never heard that. You know, if members had believed that, you know, they never chose to share it with anybody.

And on top of that, I mean, leading analysts and experts and industry folks did not see this coming. They didn't. So nobody predicted it. The best efforts and . . . you know, we model these things obviously. The member's a former minister. He knows how this works. I mean, these are modelled by professional civil servants at the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Economy — you know, previously in his government, it would've been the Department of Industry — who do the very

best they can in predicting what are going to be future prices.

Politicians don't get involved in this, as I think the minister knows as well, the member knows as well. We don't give direction. We don't make predictions. We rely on advice from the professionals in the civil service who make those, and based on that, we create a fiscal framework from that. So I don't agree with the premise. You know, we're continuing to manage through this, and it's a challenging situation. But you know, as I said and for the reasons I've laid out, I just don't think it's a valid premise.

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Chair, you know, you talk about the collapse as if we were going along a very level playing field and all of a sudden the floor fell out. You don't talk about the fact that there was a huge increase which should've set off some alarm bells. These prices are going through the roof; the price of oil is going way over \$100 a barrel and that should've set . . . If it's going up so quickly, then maybe it'll come down quickly. Maybe this is a time when we set . . . start talking about a savings account. Well why is it you only talk about the end, and not what happened at the beginning when you folks had eight years of the best record revenues? And then the collapse happened, but not thinking about what did you do during those record revenue years?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — In all of the years referenced by the member, I don't remember one occurrence where an opposition member said, oh you guys should spend less money. In question period every day, members stand up and say, spend more on this; spend more on that, spend more on . . . Every day. There was not one instance . . . Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe there was one or two. I can stand to be corrected on that. But I can't remember a single instance where members were saying, you've got to reduce spending. Never once.

I remember one quote, I remember one specific quote from at that point the leader of the opposition, former Premier Calvert, who accused us of sitting on a money of . . . a mountain so high we couldn't see over it — so think about that for a second — and saying we needed to spend way more money. And that's been the consistent position of the NDP all the way along.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, Mr. Chair, this is the kind of thing that we talk about where we have come to where, right off the bat, the minister says he doesn't remember once when we said a solution. And we've been talking about the five MLAs, like they dismiss it right away and then go to rhetoric. And this is a problem with this government. They refuse to listen. They refuse to listen if it doesn't fit their pre-formed solutions, and this is a real problem. This is a real problem with this government.

So as I just want to summarize before we move on to clause-by-clause — and I do have some amendments to add on to this, but I don't know whether there is debate allowed at the amendment level so I wanted to get all my comments out here — that this really is, for democratic governments, an overreach when you impact our caucus, both on both sides. When you cut back the 10 per cent, it's going to be, it is going to be a huge hit. It can't be just dismissed.

[18:15]

You know, you have the machinery of government on your side, and maybe it's something that won't be hit, or won't be felt on the government side, but it definitely will be felt on our side. And this is something that we are very deeply worried about, but not just because of our, you know, our own accounting, but for the people that we represent across Saskatchewan that expect us to ask the good questions, that expect us to hold the government to account. And that will become more and more difficult because of the funding cuts that this government has put upon us. This is a huge issue and it's one that shouldn't be taken lightly.

And I've made the points earlier about, you know, the majority rules and has the right to make decisions, but it must respect the minorities. And this is something that we're going to feel very, very quickly. And it's going to have impacts, and it's going to have an impact on the transparency of this government because we know, whether it's the GTH [Global Transportation Hub] or the bypass, how they are reluctant to share information. And if they do, it's heavily redacted, and hidden behind proprietary rights. And so this will become even more difficult for us.

So with that, Mr. Chair, we're ready to move to clause-by-clause, and then we can go from there.

The Chair: — Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Sorry, just very briefly before we go to the clause-by-clause. Again, you know, I would say that I appreciate the comments from the member, and I'm very sensitive to the ability of the opposition to do their job. And I would say I have full confidence in the member to do a very good job of opposition. I think we've seen that today with arguments advanced. He pulled it off by being an effective opposition parliamentarian, and I have full confidence in the other parts of the caucus to function effectively with a \$64,000 reduction to their political office. I have full confidence that they're still going to be able to pull off that role.

The Chair: — Thank you. If there are no other questions, clause 1 short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

Clause 2

The Chair: — Okay. Clause 2, is that agreed? Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — I do have an amendment that's ready. Do you want me to read it first?

The Chair: — Yes. Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Moved by Mr. David Forbes, MLA, clause 2 of the printed bill be amended:

Amend Clause 2 of the Printed Bill, by striking out 46.1(c), as being enacted by Clause 2 of the Printed Bill.

The Chair: — The amendment of clause 2, the printed bill reads:

. . . by striking out 46.1(c), as being enacted by Clause 2 of the Printed Bill.

Are there any comments before . . . Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, if I could explain because I know folks over there did not have the amendment. And so do you have the bill with you?

The Chair: — No. We could make copies if you'd like.

Mr. Forbes: — The bills are right there. It's pretty straightforward because if you get copies of the bill, then what it is essentially saying is that 46.1(c) be struck, and that's the caucus money, the 10 per cent. So that's the change. And of course we feel very strongly about that and we think this is a reasonable amendment because what it says, what we're saying is that we agree with the 3.5 per cent wage cut. We cannot abide with the 10 per cent cut for the arguments that I have made with this. So I would move that.

The Chair: — Any comments, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Well I mean in addition to . . .

The Chair: — Oh, sorry. You can't comment on that, just between the voting members. Sorry, my mistake. If there's not any more comments, we can move to vote on the amendment. All those in favour say aye.

Some Hon. Members: — Aye.

The Chair: — All those opposed, say nay.

Some Hon. Members: — Nay.

The Chair: — I believe the nays have it. The amendment is defeated. We're still on clause 2, is that agreed? Is there another . . . Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — I do have a second amendment and it is, clause 2 of the printed bill be amended in the following way:

Amend Clause 2 of the Printed Bill, by adding the following after proposed section 46.1 [and that would read]:

Maximum payments — Members of Executive Council

46.2(1) Notwithstanding any other Act, law or Order-in-Council, any member who is also a member of the executive council is not entitled to and must not receive more than \$39,175 in annual salary funded from the General Revenue Fund.

(2) Any amount that exceeds the maximum set out in subsection (1) is a debt due to the Crown and may be recovered pursuant to *The Financial Administration Act*, 1993.

So signed.

The Chair: — Will the committee take the amendment as read? Are there any comments on this amendment? Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Just to clarify for the committee, what this is is a 20 per cent reduction that we think is fitting for cabinet members in terms of taking the responsibility for the financial mess that we find ourselves in. This is the legal work for that. We think it is important that they do take responsibility, and this would bring that to force.

The Chair: — Seeing no other comments, I'll put the question. All those in favour of the amendment say aye.

Some Hon. Members: — Aye.

The Chair: — All those opposed say nay.

Some Hon. Members: — Nay.

The Chair: — I believe the nays have it. The amendment is defeated. Okay. Clause 2, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 2 agreed to.]

The Chair: — Clause 3, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Coming into force, clause 3, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. Carried.

[Clause 3 agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *An Act to Reduce Salaries of Members of the Legislative Assembly, 2017*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 47, *An Act to Reduce Salaries of Members of the Legislative Assembly, 2017* — this is a bilingual bill — without amendment. Ms. Heppner so moves.

Seeing that we have concluded our business today, I will turn it over to the minister if he has any final comments.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Sure. Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I want to thank members of the Assembly for being here today. I want to thank Mr. Forbes for his questions and comments and obviously a thoughtful presentation. I appreciate that.

And I think we had a good discussion, and I'm hoping those that were, you know, listening came away enlightened and, you know, hopefully can see that it's not always partisan. It's not

question period in here every day. We do have good discussions that are valuable and worthwhile. And I look forward to working with the members at the Board of Internal Economy in the future.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. I want to thank the committee members. I felt heard today. I appreciate that. I want to thank the Law Clerk for the help with the drafting of the amendments. I want to thank the library for the research. And we'll see where this proceeds. I am always an optimist, and hopefully we can restore the relationship and move forward. So thank you, Mr. Minister, for your appearance today. Thank you.

The Chair: — With business being concluded, I will now ask a member to move that we adjourn.

Mr. Steinley: — Yes.

The Chair: — Mr. Steinley so moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 18:25.]