



# **Special Committee on Rules and Procedures**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

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**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON RULES AND PROCEDURES  
2000**

Hon. Ron Osika, Chair  
Melville

Myron Kowalsky, Vice-Chair  
Prince Albert Carlton

Dan D'Autremont  
Cannington

Debbie Higgins  
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Hon. Jack Hillson  
North Battleford

Ken Krawetz  
Canora-Pelly

Don McMorris  
Indian Head-Milestone

Andrew Thomson  
Regina South

The committee met at 8:30 a.m.

**The Chair:** — Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I think I'll call the meeting to order. I'm glad to see that everybody's in fine form today. I wish I'd have found where the party was after the singsong. No, I just want to welcome everybody here and you've got an agenda that's been distributed to you.

And what I'd like to do before we do anything else is the election of a vice-chairman. And I would open the floor up for nominations of a vice-chairman for our committee . . . vice-chairperson.

**Ms. Higgins:** — Could we have precedent?

**The Chair:** — Pardon me?

**Ms. Higgins:** — Precedent? What it normally is or how this goes?

**Mr. Putz:** — It has been a government member.

**Mr. Thomson:** — I would now nominate Mr. Kowalsky.

**The Chair:** — Secunder? Any further nominations? If not, I'll entertain a motion to close nominations. Mr. D'Autremont. So it's moved by Mr. Thomson that Mr. Kowalsky be elected to preside as Vice-Chair of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Mr. Chair, before we go further I notice that Ken Krawetz is named to this committee. Is there right of substitution on this committee or not?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — I interject. What we are planning on doing is making a recommendation in the House for a new member.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Okay.

**The Chair:** — Okay, thank you. Mr. Kowalsky, congratulations on your nomination and your election.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Easiest election ever won.

**The Chair:** — What I'd like to do at this point is just to remind us, all of us, of how the committee came about and what our terms of reference are. The motion passed by the Assembly on a motion of Mr. Lingenfelter and seconded by Ms. MacKinnon, by leave of the Assembly, it was:

Ordered, That a Special Committee composed of Mr. Speaker as Chair and members D'Autremont, Higgins, Hillson, Kowalsky, Krawetz, McMorris, and Thomson, be appointed to examine such matters as it deems advisable with respect to the rules, procedures, practices and powers of the Legislative Assembly, its operation and organization, and the facilities and services provided to the Assembly, its committees and members.

That this Special Committee be instructed to include in its report, drafts of proposed rules to give effect, if adopted by

the Assembly, to any change or changes that may be proposed by the committee.

and also

That the committee have the power to sit during the intersessional period and during the sessions except when the Assembly is sitting, and that the committee have the power to send for persons, papers and records, and to examine witnesses under oath, to receive representations from interested parties and individuals, and to hold meetings away from the seat of the government in order that provisions in other legislatures can be studied.

And also

That this committee be instructed to report to the Assembly with all convenient speed.

It's a challenge to this committee what's facing us, and I believe it's an opportunity perhaps to look at some changes perhaps to take us into the 21st century with new technology, with some of the new demands and changes that have occurred or we expect to have occurred.

So it is quite a challenge that each and every one of you . . . I appreciate you have accepted that responsibility and look forward to having a productive, productive sessions, and ultimately some very profound reports on and proposals for recommendations to the House for changes. Okay, any questions or comments at this point in time that need clarification?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — As you're looking at the agenda, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a suggestion about how we handle this today. Because we could . . . there's a whole lot of stuff here that we have in material that we have before us, and so what I'd propose is that under consideration of terms of reference there's a . . . I'd like us at the first opportunity to be able to table a paper that we have here for us — table it with the committee — proposals for some democratic reform that would open up the legislature more to the public and make it more accessible and also streamline procedures and modernize the legislature.

I'd like to be able to put that in at about . . . you've got four bullets under 4 . . . item . . . I'd like to put it on top of that. Give us an opportunity to explain it a little bit to committee members for further consideration later on. I would suggest also that we might put in under . . . in that same position the . . . an opportunity for the opposition party to give a brief explanation of the submission that they've provided to this committee.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Kowalsky, excuse me if I interrupt. There's just a couple more housekeeping things before we get into that. That's very valid and we want to talk about that. There's just a couple of housekeeping things, I'm sorry that I overlooked.

And it's a motion that Mr. Gregory Putz, Deputy Clerk be appointed as Clerk of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures. Could someone move that motion? Mr. D'Autremont. Secunder, any discussion? Oh, we don't need a

second, okay. Okay, question, all those in favour? Carried.

It's just a matter of not a motion but an agreement from the committee members that we have verbatim reports of any of our committee meetings.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's agreed. Thank you.

Now if I may go to what you were talking about, Mr. Kowalsky, we do have some fairly lengthy submissions based on, or as a result of, the letter that had gone out to committee members inviting input and suggestions and ideas for discussion. And as we've handed out, there are a considerable number of issues that do need to be addressed.

And I guess the important thing for us to do with the amount of . . . the number of suggestions and ideas, that we perhaps prioritize those that should be dealt with in the immediate future. We have to consider that any rule changes as you all know, will have to be researched by staff for preparation and presentation as recommendations.

So if that's what you were leading up to, Mr. Kowalsky, as far as priority of issues that have been raised to be dealt with.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, that precisely was what I was trying to do was acknowledge that we have a big job here that will take more than a one-hour meeting. But that we in order . . . there's some work that has been done prior by the two caucuses and I think that what I would like to do is have those items just clarified and explained at this stage. And then we proceed from those two items, the item that I've mentioned, the government proposal for democratic reform which we want to lay before the committee. And also the considerations on private . . . mostly related to private members' days that the opposition put forward.

I expect that the amount of time taken to explain the paper that we're looking at probably five to ten minutes; maybe an equal time for opposition members to clarify their proposals. Then what we could do is go down the topics as you have put them forward and maybe we'll go through the process there and itemize. Maybe people have comments what they'd like to tackle first.

There's one other item that I'd like to do — business item — before we close if possible. That would be that we're prepared to actually pass two items, make two decisions today. I've been in consultation with members from the opposition, but I'll have to have them make their own comments on this.

But we're prepared to move on two items, fairly straightforward. One is the items pertaining to laptops and have them with access to the legislature. Full access of laptops to the legislature — laptops without their sound systems. And secondly is the permission . . . permit the substitutions to the Public Accounts Committee. The two items are relatively simple and . . . but we're prepared to actually make decisions on those with the permission of a committee, of the committee. So I leave that . . . throw that back to you now, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Kowalsky.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Yes, I'm more than prepared to provide an explanation, clarification on the items that we have brought forward, and I would agree with Mr. Kowalsky on the laptops and the substitutions.

And I would also like to include in that though the consideration of permitting non-alcoholic beverages in the Chamber at any time. We're allowed to have water in there now; we're allowed to have coffee or pop — as the case may be — in unidentified containers during committee. And I see no reason why that couldn't be extended to the rest of the session.

**The Chair:** — Any other discussion on that, on those two issues? So I take it that what you're recommending is that number 1, laptop computers be allowed at all times during House sittings. Is that battery operated? These are things we have to consider at this point.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — That's all that's available to us.

**The Chair:** — Okay. For the time being. All right. So I guess I raise that in the event that well we have laptops, we're going to have to run a bunch of cords and things across the floors and what not.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — But not today.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — And I don't think, Mr. Chairman, though that we want to foreclose getting the Chamber wired. I think that is, that is the hope, isn't it?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Oh, certainly.

**The Chair:** — Well what we'll do then, we'll draft a motion to that effect, and then perhaps bring it back a little later on. Okay. Now on the other matter of . . .

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — If we could draft motions on, on all three of those items, Mr. Speaker, before the end of the meeting, it would be, it would be quite helpful.

**The Chair:** — It was just brought to my attention, and that's a good point as well, laptops at all times — does that include question period as well? And I raise this, it was brought to my attention that there are some jurisdictions that, that do not allow them to be in the House during question period.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — From my point of view, Mr. Speaker, I'm sort of ambivalent towards it. I see some pros and some cons. I don't see right now that it would be of great advantage to have it in question period or, in fact, as it could be a bit of a disadvantage if you're trying to answer your question or ask the question and look at your computer screen at the same time. So I don't see it being either a negative or a positive in that sense.

So it could be during question period because obviously not everyone is involved in question period.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Again just to clarify, the current rule, (c), states that they must not be used by a member who has the floor or is involved in an exchange of remarks. And I guess that's the

... that's what was agreed to previously.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — And I would think that that's probably still acceptable to us.

**The Chair:** — Okay. So (c) could remain and we'll draft a motion for consideration when ... before the end of the meeting. Thank you.

The next item that you'd raised was the allowance of non-alcoholic beverages at all times beyond what we currently have allotted. Any discussion or comments? Yes, Mr. Hillson.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — I just don't think coffee cups of this sort would look good in the House during debate, but ...

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well what most people I think normally use now during committee are the little plastic ones with the white liners. You know, they're fairly innocuous.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Yes.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — But these, you know, they've got the legislative symbol on them and ...

**The Chair:** — That's perhaps a good point. And I guess I'd ask the committee if they would look to the Speaker's office to perhaps arrange for suitable containers for the Assembly rather than have a hodgepodge and the plastic ones that people take with them on road trips and so on.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — I wonder if we could add the word discreet or ... you know, when you say "unlabelled containers" or what have you. What's the term?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well I think they were ... in practice it was supposed to be non-identified. So you couldn't have a Coke can in there or some sort of ...

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Non-identified, discreet containers. But I don't think we want a lot of loud, clunky coffee mugs in the TV screen ... (inaudible interjection) ... Yes.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — So do we all have to have Melville constituency ...

**The Chair:** — And unidentified contents as well.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — And North Stars paraphernalia accepted.

**The Chair:** — Okay, we'll come back with a motion on that as well for your consideration. Okay. Well those two items have been dealt with.

Mr. Kowalsky, would you care then to go through your proposals and then we'll allow Mr. D'Autremont to go through ...

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well we still have the discussion on the substitutions yet.

**The Chair:** — Oh, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — I think ... (inaudible) ... you've identified the rule — was it 94? I'll just check this out. What we'd like is a motion that would effectively permit substitutions to the Public Accounts Committee. Right now the constitution of the Public Accounts Committee is ... The precedent I understand that we were working on was that continuity was regarded as a very important item on that committee.

One of the things we found is we've had to actually postpone or cancel meetings because a certain member was not able to attend when there was agreement to call a meeting. And we think that we should try to avoid that. We felt that ... Our committee feels that it's a more significant thing and it's an overriding issue to have the meetings when they are called. And continuity really hasn't been a problem to us and we don't anticipate that we're going to be switching people in and out all the time.

It's a matter of keeping the committee functioning. And I know that there have been times, not recently but in the years past, where we had difficulty so it would be quite helpful and would work very much like the Crown Corporations Committee.

**The Chair:** — So the change would be an addition to rule 94 subparagraph (4)?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Right.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — We're prepared to agree to change the rules to substitution for some consideration of goodwill in some other parts of the discussion. Obviously at the present time, the substitution rule is of benefit to the government members in a tight House. And we recognize that they have a role to play in this and an important role; and we're prepared to make that consideration for them, for some future considerations.

**A Member** — Money in the bank.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — You mean trades?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — We don't want any North Stars though.

**The Chair:** — Were those the three issues that needed to be immediately dealt with? Can we then proceed, Mr. Kowalsky, with your list?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Yes. What I'd like to do at this time is to turn the mike over to Mr. Thomson who ... Well maybe we'll distribute these papers. I have one for you, Mr. Speaker, table it officially. And I have copies for everybody else. And I'll ask Mr. Thomson to lead us in this and give us an explanation of what it is we're proposing.

**Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Speaker, what we have undertaken as NDP (New Democratic Party) members on the committee is a fair amount of discussion over the last several months, thinking about rule changes in a larger context of opening up the Assembly and providing greater public input into the discussions and decision making that we have. We have also given a fair amount of thought to ways which we might want to streamline the Assembly's processes to make more efficient use of members' time, to provide perhaps a better structure for some of our discussion, for more informed debate, and greater

participation of members in dealing with the legislative agenda.

To that end, what we have come up with is a series of recommendations affecting committee structure. The basic premise of it, as you know, is that we have currently 12 standing committees which are greatly underutilized. We would propose that we reduce the number of standing committees from 12 to 5 and allow them a much more substantive role in dealing with review of legislation at the committee stage, with review of estimates, and with review of regulation.

So the process that we would look at is similar on the legislative side to the way the House of Commons works, following the McGrath report of '86, where legislation would be referred off in our system, not necessarily Committee of the Whole, but would be referred to a standing committee for review.

Members would be enabled to participate in debate, and we would recommend adding one additional component to that and that is the ability to call witnesses and hear invited groups and delegations who may wish to offer opinion or advice on legislative matters. This is a fundamental change and a substantive change for our Assembly. It's a process that we've used sparingly in our Assembly, although with some success, I think members would agree, with the Agricultural standing committee in December.

Our sense was coming out of that discussion in December that this was a positive process that we could in fact expand to other areas. I think all of us as members know that while we're the representatives of the people and certainly have the right and the responsibility to cast votes on behalf of constituents, there's never anything wrong with hearing from a larger number of interested parties.

Having said that, we're mindful also of the fact that we do not want the committees to become hijacked by special interests and lobbyists. This is of course in the American system one of the great blights that they have. And so we would want to . . . There would be an onus on all members to ensure that there was certainly responsible debate and some discussion about who may appear.

Obviously on housekeeping legislation there'd be likely no need to call anybody. On more substantive legislation we may wish to call interested parties to appear, whether to make verbal or written submissions.

In terms of extending the process, we would also envision a revised . . . renewed committee system to be useful in dealing with departmental estimates. This would allow, we believe, a greater specialization within the legislature's members to gain an understanding of what is happening within the departments, to have a better dialogue with officials. It would deal with some of the other issues that we currently have some limitations on in the Assembly.

Opposition members have expressed concern that they do not have the ability to have staff present with them in the Assembly to help them pose questions and deal with some of the administrative political work that needs to be done. Certainly government members, I think, would welcome the opportunity to have deputies at the Table so that they may be able to directly

answer some more technical nature questions.

Basically the Public Accounts Committee does a lot of this after the fact. And I think that by moving to a reform system in the review of estimates we could enhance this process a great deal — enhance the understanding members have, and also provide for a greater role for private members.

The third item and the third component to committee reform that we are looking at would be to provide for a streamlining of the process so that we could look at concurrent review of legislation and estimates. Currently, as you know, the quorum requirements in the Assembly are that 16 of us must be there at all times. As Mr. D'Autremont . . . 15 of us; we like to keep one extra just in case.

But of course the difficulty is, is that it is a combination of factors which mean we are perhaps not utilizing our time all that effectively. Government members, as you know, rarely participate in the exchange in the Assembly except for ministers. That the opposition members, like government members, rarely is it more than one or two participating in the discussion.

By going to concurrent review they perhaps have the ability to have two committees meeting simultaneously. We could provide, I think, for a greater depth of understanding of what is happening in estimates and legislation. I don't look at this as an opportunity to spend less time in the legislative process, but rather to allow us to spend a greater amount of time going into the discussions. So that is a third important component to what we see in terms of committee reform.

And then the final set of issues that we want to look at are what we generally call modernization issues. And I think all members have some interest in this from having laptop computers in the Assembly at all times, to allowing us to have Internet and e-mail access, the ability for us to have our verbatims posted on the Internet, perhaps the ability for us to broadcast directly onto the Internet our proceedings. In this area we haven't spent a lot of time thinking about the possibilities, but I think there's a great number of opportunities we have to really bring this legislature closer to people and to provide greater input.

That is largely what we are looking at. Now there's a series of recommendations that we've attached to the discussion paper, and I just want to emphasize that in our view this really is a discussion paper. It's not something we're particularly wedded to, but it's something we hope will create a lot of discussion with members.

We've tried to present a balanced approach which I hope will meet needs of opposition members as well as government members. And with that, I would simply say that I'm pleased that we've had the opportunity to present this to you, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss it at some length in the future and have some future review on it.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Thomson.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you. Yes we're very interested in the items that Mr. Thomson brought forward. But sitting on the

opposition side, our emphasis has been more on the role of opposition within the Assembly, and that's why our proposals deal more specifically with the role of opposition.

The feeling that we have — and I've sat now on opposition for eight years — is that private members' day in general accomplishes very little. It does give an avenue for expression on some of the issues of the day, but rarely does that expression ever resolve itself to a conclusion. Debates are brought forward and there's never a vote taken on them. They're simply either talked out or adjourned, never to return again.

We'd like to see some resolution to a number of the debates that come forward. We have under rule 75 the opportunity to hold a debate and a vote. Unfortunately it's the exception rather than the rule that a vote actually takes place. We would like to see that change so that a vote does take place at the end of a rule 75 debate.

We believe that it would be worthwhile having two of those on a private members' day, one sponsored by the government and one sponsored by the opposition, both of which would result in a vote.

There are a number of other issues that also affect the opposition in private members' day. The opposition puts forward a number of Bills, they receive first reading, and then rarely if ever see the light of day again. We believe that there are a number of these initiatives that are certainly worthwhile and should be brought forward to debate.

It doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to pass. But then when the government presents a Bill before the House, it doesn't necessarily mean that Bill is going to pass either. It's up to the legislature to make that determination. So we would like to have the opportunity as opposition, on opposition days, to bring forward pieces of legislation.

I believe in the House of Commons, probably from the McGrath report, that the opposition has the right to bring forward Bills and they do receive a vote. They may be passed, they may be rejected as the case may be, based on their merits, but they do actually go through the process the same as a government Bill. And we believe that would be certainly worthwhile.

There are likely other changes that we are prepared to take a look at. We would also like to modernize the Assembly. We're operating not much differently than what this Assembly operated in the 1960s, probably with the addition of the television being the only real, major, substantive modernization. There is no reason, after having seen a number of other jurisdictions, that we can't modernize and move into the next millennium in our Assembly.

I'm very interested in having access at our desktops to the Internet, to e-mail. In fact, I'll relate an example to you. While I was down in North Dakota, debate was going on in the House. Members there have computers on their desktops at their desk in the legislature, and the public was e-mailing them in comments during debate.

Mrs. Jones from Williston would, you know, write out an

e-mail and send it in to her member saying she agreed or disagreed or whatever the case may be. But the public had immediate access to the floor during debate and could make their comments. And the member could utilize those comments as they saw fit.

But it provided a more active participation by the general public in the legislative process, and I think that would certainly be worthwhile and give the public a better understanding of how laws are actually made and interpreted in this province.

So I think there are a number of areas that we need to move forward in. We'd like to see changes made to make private members' day more meaningful to everyone in the Assembly — not just opposition, but government members also — that we do come to some resolutions on private members' day.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Thank you, Mr. D'Autremont. Well we've already advanced in the direction of some agreement here, given that I noticed on page 13 of the submission from the government side, permitting transferable membership, excluding the Chair, in all standing committees. We're already making progress.

Okay. We then go back to our prioritizing, or prioritizing of the many numbers of issues that have come forward — those items that need to be dealt with on an immediate basis and the near future and then the long-term. So can we . . . Anybody want to make some suggestions as to where we start on the basis of the submissions of 10 items for consideration.

The first one has already been talked about by Mr. D'Autremont — the private members' business. The second is decorum and services in the Chamber, public access and accountability. All very important issues that will need some background work and some debate, no doubt.

Measures to expedite public business, times of sitting — that's another consideration that perhaps you may want to have dealt with sooner than later. Financial procedures, the legislative processes, committee procedures, facilities, programs, services, and any other matters such as codified, a confidence convention, free votes and so on. There's a plateful, and maybe we can start zeroing in on those that need to be dealt with on a more urgent basis to allow our staff, our resource people, to do the research background and bring it forth.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well, we have indeed a full plate here. And I'm not sure that we need to make changes during this particular session on the majority of items.

There may be some that, as we go through this, that we may wish to make more immediate changes on, and perhaps we can have an interim report that might be able to do that. But I think if we go through this and develop a package that we can all agree to, that it could come into play for the next session rather than trying to implement it partway through a session.

**The Chair:** — Good point, any comments?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — I would concur with that. I think that some of the changes that are proposed certainly would require considerable discussion in both caucuses, and people might

want to consult outside as well. And we would be targeting the beginning of the next session of the legislature for the major implementations.

But there may be some things that we can order. For example, I think where . . . in three places I saw the mention of the concept of modernizing the legislature and looking at wiring and we could perhaps work . . . if we could work, have a suggestion maybe coming from your office, Mr. Speaker, as to how we could get an estimate of the costs because that's one of the things that would have to be worked into next year's budget.

The cost of wiring the legislature for use of Internet . . . and there's also apparently now wireless systems so maybe we don't have to wire it. We could look into that and perhaps if we could authorize your office to undertake that. It's my understanding that SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) has already done some of that work, has some of the estimates, but if we could bring that forward to the committee for the next meeting that would be helpful I think.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Or perhaps, Mr. Speaker, such a reference should be made to the Communications Committee. I don't know. That would seem to fall within their purview. I'm not exactly sure on that but that might be an avenue also.

**The Chair:** — Some of it may overlap as well between that committee, Mr. D'Autremont, and this committee as well. So definitely there would be a sharing of information.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — But I do think though that a formal motion recommending that whatever the appropriate body is, obtain quotes. An estimate is in order.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well yes. Not just quotes but just what direction do we want to go on this. North Dakota has direct access. I don't . . . sure how much, and you know, the whole system, but they have access right at their desk to a large . . . to the Internet. I think Edmonton has their offices connected up, but I don't know whether they have outside access or not.

You know, so there's a number of different avenues and certainly wireless is becoming a lot more proficient now. Although when I turn on my radio at times, it's difficult to get stations inside of the building because of the stone walls. So we need to . . . if we're going to go to a wireless design as such that it actually does work in all corners of the building.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — I don't know if this is premature or not, but in view of some of the comments I've heard from Mr. D'Autremont, I'm not sure that I favour us placing restrictions on to when a laptop could be used. Now of course, in an American system the questioning of ministers does not occur. But the restriction that's proposed here would in fact prevent the sort of access to someone who's involved in, say, estimates or debate. And I'm not sure that's appropriate.

And I also agree with Mr. D'Autremont's comment that in any event if you have a few moments to formulate an answer, you know, somebody trying to interrupt you either verbally or on a laptop is a, you know, dubious advantage anyway.

So I'm not sure. I just flag the issue, but I'm not sure that I

would favour putting a restriction.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well since we have already more or less agreed to allow the laptops in there at all times, we will have an experiment then, between now and whenever our final report comes down, to determine how well it has worked in that time period.

**The Chair:** — Just to underline that there are two separate issues that we've talked about the communications. One is the authority which the Rules and Regulations Committee is responsible to put in place. The other technical aspects will have to come from other sources. So as long as we have the authority . . .

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — We facilitate the capability; we don't actually provide the service.

**The Chair:** — Any other comments along those lines?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Mr. Speaker, do you need a motion on that to authorize you to order estimates and proposals and then maybe bring them back? Then at that stage we can decide whether we want to go further with that ourselves or give some other committee, like the Communications Committee, work to do on it.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — I think the Board of Internal Economy made a recommendation — did they not? — to pursue that?

**The Chair:** — What I'd like to do is ask Greg to maybe give us a preliminary report on where we're at in that respect.

**Mr. Putz:** — Members of the committee, some of you might recall that the Board of Internal Economy in looking at technology issues did ask the Speaker to ask SPMC where they are at in this building in wiring and what the cost might be to complete the project with regard to wiring the building so that there'd be network coverage for each of the caucuses. And we went one further, because some of these issues were raised in the proposals to Mr. Speaker, or this Rules Committee process, about wiring the Chamber. And then also we've had some very preliminary discussions with some folks about the wireless. I could give you kind of a basic outline where we're at now with respect to our findings.

The network wiring of the building, the SPMC has informed us that they are much more advanced than we had anticipated in wiring this building. Our estimates in talking with SPMC and their computer cabling contractor is that additional fibre optic cabling and Ethernet drops to provide networks for all of the caucuses would only be about \$3,000. Cabinets for housing the network switches would be about another 2,000, and that means that we could probably complete this project for about \$5,000.

Now mind you, there are hardware costs involved in providing the network, so those things have to be taken into consideration. Hardware costs, fibre optic capable switches, we estimate we need eight of those; that would be \$28,000.

Now network cards for computers and that, we put a figure in there. I'm not sure where we're going to go with that given that the caucuses now have been given a grant for technology in



their own shops, but we . . . 58 times about \$100 a card for that, would be about \$5,800. And with servers, about \$20,000 times three, that's another 60,000. So the hardware would be another \$95,000.

So the total cost would be about \$100,000 to complete the project, of which we had originally anticipated the wiring would be much more — that's about \$5,000. We'd always known that having separate servers to run each of the networks would probably be the main cost. And I know I said that would probably be about \$60,000.

So that's the network side of things with using fibre optics and the Ethernet cables that are already in existence and completing the areas that the fibre isn't running to right now.

Now networking the Chamber, SPMC tells us that would be about \$15,000 bringing power to each of the desks so that members could plug in, wouldn't have to run their batteries down — that would be about \$15,000.

Running the Ethernet cables to each desk, put them on parallel with the offices in each of the caucuses around the building, we're assuming 85 locations even though there's only 58 members. We're trying to take into account the various movement of desks around the Chamber, and in the last number of years there's been quite a bit of that. So we have to anticipate, we . . . Unless we go to a system where the desks are there and they're stationary and they don't move, we're going to have to anticipate this. So . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Right.

So anticipating that we're assuming 85 locations for this wire to plug in, in various configurations in the Chamber, that would cost us about \$15,630. Then the network cards for each of the laptops to plug into this system would be about another 6,100. Then the network switches to hook the Chamber up to the various networks would be about 10,000. So that would be about \$32,000 to equip the Chamber, allow members to have access to the various networks, the Assembly network, and that would then put us in good stead for building on that as a platform in the future.

The wireless networking in the Chamber, one of the things that Mr. D'Autremont mentioned is that in this building there's a lot of marble and concrete in it, and SPMC advises that a lot of people have trouble with their cellphones here, their radios, and that sort of thing. The same problems would exist for wireless.

Now we've made a contact . . . we made contact with a vendor that sells these sort of things, so the numbers I'm going to give you are kind of, like I said, very preliminary and they're just based on verbal discussions without anybody actually coming here to look at the situation.

They tell us that wiring this building . . . or wireless networking this building would be much like setting up a cellphone exchange. We'd have to have little relays all over the place, and there'd have to be probably quite a few of those, given the nature and construction of this building.

We'd still need the fibre optic cable to the Chamber to get onto the various networks. That would be about \$30,000. The

network switches for wireless networks would be \$87,000. The wireless base stations — estimate we'd need about 24 of those — that would \$57,600. And the wireless network cards which are fairly expensive — they're about \$800 apiece — we need 58 of those; it'd be \$46,400. So the total cost would be about \$220,000 to do the wireless right now.

So it's considerable expense over the hard wiring of the building. But that's mainly because a lot of that wiring has already been accomplished; it's there. It doesn't mean that as technology advances in the future, eventually you couldn't go to wireless. But we do already . . . SPMC already has made an investment in laying down fibre cable in the building, and so I said it wouldn't be that much more to just finish the job.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Just on that point, are you saying too that even if we went to that expense in the wireless, that the results would be uncertain?

**Mr. Putz:** — Well what the technical people have told me is that because of the construction of this building, we need many relays around the building to make sure that you have decent coverage.

But I don't know. Like I said, they haven't been to the building to do tests to see what the range of the signal would be and whether it could go through marble or just that sort of thing. Like I said, it's very preliminary right now. It's just based on telling them what the building's made out of.

They tell us that normally wireless communication is good for building to building, sort of thing. And in the buildings, a lot of them are still using, you know, their local area networks. And then to get outside the building, then that's where a lot of this wireless technology is right now.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — It would seem just from the prices that we would be better off at the present time going ahead with the hard wiring if that was what the committee was interested in doing. Especially if a lot of the wiring is already in place.

I guess the one question I would have, and there was no mention of this, what about wiring committee rooms? Obviously we're going to be sitting in here. If some of the other proposals are accepted, we're certainly going to be doing more committee work, and I think it would be worthwhile having committee rooms wired also.

**The Chair:** — I'll ask Greg to answer that as well, please.

**Mr. Putz:** — They forgot to check to see if the wiring had come to this room. This is our only committee room and they were investigating that when I asked that earlier this week.

There is another consideration there. I'm not sure which of the caucuses, if any of them — maybe I just have this in my mind — I think there was some suggestion that perhaps this committee room would be wired for television broadcast of committee proceedings. And if that's the case, then that's another issue and it's a different cabling issue altogether. I mean the cable is going to run side by side, but it's a different type of cabling and another issue altogether which could be looked at in conjunction, but it's just a different issue.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — I don't know whether the government thinks of this, but I would think that it would be worth our while to also cable in our caucus meeting rooms. I know ours is used at times for committee hearings. I don't think the government one is, but I could wrong on that.

But I would have to assume — and they can correct me if I'm wrong — that it would be beneficial for both government and opposition though that their committee rooms be ... not committee rooms, their caucus meeting rooms be wired also. If we're going to do it, why limit ourselves? Why leave holes in the system?

**The Chair:** — Particularly, if I can just add to that for consideration, if in the event that there is an approval to go ahead with the reduction in the numbers of committees and more intense use of committees and committee rooms for verbatim reports and so on. So that is a consideration.

**Mr. Putz:** — If I could make a comment on that. What we looked at, my understanding is that the fibre is on the first and second floors in both wings. Now I'm not sure about the basement where this room is situated. But Mr. D'Autremont is correct, at one time when the committees were more active, room 255 served actually as the home of the Crown Corporations Committee and was used much more actively.

And if this committee is proposing an increase in activity to allow more than one committee to meet at a time, then I think that the committee will have to consider other meeting rooms for committees so that we could not just have the computers wired in, but our *Hansard* transcription and possibly television as well.

**Mr. Thomson:** — I think that this is a good point, Mr. Speaker, that we would need to give some thought to maybe another dedicated committee room. That may be one of the ramifications of the changes we're looking at.

I appreciate Mr. D'Autremont's suggestion that we look at wiring the caucus rooms, although I'm ... I must say personally I'm always a little reluctant that we start turning those rooms into committee rooms.

It's probably greater imposition on the opposition. Our committee room, our caucus room is mostly a ceremonial tea place. It's half the time a tea room, it seems these days, for special functions. Now whether there's ability for us to make better use of the radio room, which I assume is wired for everything at this point, I don't know. But this may be something that your office or the Clerk's office would like to give some thought to.

**The Chair:** — Yes. Mr. Putz just mentioned that video conferencing is a thing of the future as well, so certainly that's valid.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — I know that the government caucus meeting room is often used as well for briefings from departments. Ministers will bring in their departments and do some committee work. What I'd like to do is ask, actually ask cabinet whether they would find it advantageous from the government point of view of having some kind of contact, electronic

contact, with outside the House, and also whether the cabinet room itself needs to be wired or not.

I'm just not familiar where the practice that they ... I know they don't use anything electronic in there now, it's pretty well all discussion with paper. But it might be advantageous.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — I suspect the answer would be no.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — But we should nevertheless look at it.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — The question should be asked though.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — I think we would hate to go through the exercise of wiring the building and leave out some point and decide two years down the road that we should have done it.

**Mr. McMorris:** — I don't think there's any problem with adding, is there? Is there that much more expensive to add? I mean, because to cover all the bases in one shot it's not probably going to happen. It's going to be an ongoing process, I would think.

**The Chair:** — These are all excellent suggestions and considerations that now committee members can take with them to digest. As he indicated earlier, Mr. D'Autremont, this is not something that is going to happen immediately. Those issues that we have dealt with this morning, that we do have motions to deal with, we can implement.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Regarding though this point that it's not going to be implemented overnight, some of these recommendations do have public interest. And so I think that before revise we should address our minds to how — I take it this is a public document now — how perhaps it can be out there.

Some of the issues we're dealing with are strictly internal, would be of no interest to anyone outside of members. But there are some issues in here that I think that it would be helpful for the general public to hear about and get their input. And I think that we should have a moment to discuss how it's possible for some of these suggestions to get out into the public forum.

**Mr. Thomson:** — I wonder if it might be wise to have the Speaker and the Chair and the Vice-Chair, maybe a member of the opposition, think about developing a work plan for us to tackle some of these items. So maybe we could meet again in the not too distant future to approve that and see how this schedule works out. I'm interested in Mr. Hillson's idea that we have some opportunity for a somewhat broader public input.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — I wonder, if I may, Mr. Chair, regarding Andrew's comment, perhaps if you as Chair, or someone else, developed an interim report to the House and so if we made an interim report to the House indicating in the House publicly the sort of things we're thinking around, that would be a way of alerting the media and the general public to the direction we're proposing to move.

**The Chair:** — Might that be facilitated perhaps through either formal or an informal subcommittee of this committee to review those agenda items that might be made subject to such a report?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well we could certainly put in place a steering committee, let's say, but it perhaps wouldn't be ill-advised to issue a news release from this committee stating that the Rules Committee is in place, that it's starting to have hearings, or meetings, and these are some of the areas that we are looking at.

**The Chair:** — With a need to determine specifically those areas that we want to broadcast for external consumption.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well just stating that we're looking at, you know, modernizing the process, providing a more efficient use of the legislature, and opening the process up.

**The Chair:** — Sort of a generic . . .

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Yes, yes. Without getting into specifics. Most of the general public don't understand the specifics of how this place operates, but they certainly understand the end results.

**The Chair:** — Any comments about that?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — I think that will be quite satisfactory, Mr. Speaker. We would, if we pass these — get into these motions and pass them — we would then be, I think, the next step would be that this has to be reported to the legislature. And that would be your first report. And I suppose you could have an addendum to your report with respect to . . .

**A Member:** — Interim report.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — An interim report, an addendum to your interim report indicating some of the considerations, things that the committee in general terms is taking under consideration. And then a press release after that if you see fit — leave it up to your good judgment.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Well we'll certainly make sure that it's within the parameters of what's been discussed here.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — And I might suggest maybe that in the interim, until we get to the next meeting, perhaps what we can do is have some informal discussions with yourself, Mr. Speaker, and maybe with Mr. D'Autremont, between Mr. D'Autremont and myself and we'd try to sort of come down with a priority list. Where we'd like to go next meeting.

**The Chair:** — Excellent, excellent idea.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Do you want a formal motion that the steering committee be yourself, Myron Kowalsky, Dan D'Autremont?

**The Chair:** — If that's the committee's wish.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — I'll so move.

**The Chair:** — We'll have that motion prepared, Mr. Hillson, and perhaps while we're doing that, unless you want some further discussion on any of these topics or issues, what I would do is propose the motions that we had discussed earlier. And the first one being:

That the use of laptop computers be allowed in the legislative Chamber, subject to the following restrictions, as interpreted by the Chair:

(a) they must operate silently;

(b) they must not be used by the member who has the floor or is involved in the exchange of remarks.

I'll entertain a mover for that motion. Mr. D'Autremont. And a seconder. Well we don't need . . . I'm sorry.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Mr. Chair, I've already indicated I'm not certain that (b) is in order. Mr. D'Autremont has already indicated, you know, in the state House in Bismarck that even citizens e-mail in their comments. So I'm not at all sure I'm in favour of leaving (b) there.

**The Chair:** — Well that's up for discussion by committee.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — If I might make the suggestion that allowing it to be used at all times in the House is a change for us. And perhaps we should go with that change initially, determine how it's working, and see whether or not it would be valuable to us to go to unlimited use. Right now we're not wired anyway so nobody could contact us, and until such time it's really not going to be an issue.

And so do it without the access initially because there's no way to access unless you're using a cellphone, which is not permitted in there. So there's no way to access right now anyways. And then when we do get it wired, make the determination of how it's worked up till that point, and if need be we can change the rules again. Is that . . .

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — We're prepared to live with that, Mr. Speaker. I think that suggestion, one step at a time, and if we have to claw something back we're in a position to do that; and we can also . . . A committee is established that we can meet and make these decisions fairly easily on that one.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Thank you. So the motion again . . . Do you want me to read it again? Or . . .

**A Member:** — No.

**The Speaker:** — Okay.

That the use of the laptop computers be allowed in the Legislative Chamber subject to the following restrictions, as interpreted by the Chair:

(a) they must operate silently;

(b) they must not be used by the member who has the floor or is involved in the exchange of remarks.

Ready for the question? All those in favour? Carried. Thank you.

The next motion to be entertained by the committee:

That rule 94(4) of the *Rules and Procedures of the*

*Legislative Assembly* be amended to add the words “and on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts” after constitutional affairs in the third line.

This relates to the replacement of members on the Public Accounts Committee.

Do I have a mover? Mr. Kowalsky. Any discussion on that? Is there any . . . I think that's pretty much straightforward.

And we are advancing. Those are two . . . at least two items so far that have already been recommended. Look at this progress — that's progress. We're just charging into the new century with change . . . (inaudible) . . . Okay. Thank you.

Okay. And the third one:

That non-alcoholic beverages be permissible in the Chamber at all times in discreet containers as approved by the Speaker.

I'll entertain a mover for that motion. Mr. Thomson. Any discussion on the motion? Ready for the question? All those in favour? Thank you. Carried.

Okay, we have one final one:

That a steering committee be appointed to establish an agenda and priority of business for subsequent meetings, and that the membership to be composed of Mr. Speaker, Mr. Kowalsky, and Mr. D'Autremont.

Any discussion? Mover? Ms. Higgins.

**Mr. Putz:** — No. Moved by Mr. Hillson.

**The Chair:** — Oh this one. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Sorry about that. Okay, question? All those in favour? Okay, thank you. Carried.

Okay, when would the committee like to report our progress?

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — What's the earliest timeline?

**The Chair:** — We can do an . . . Excuse me, we're just consulting here. I guess there's a public discussion aspect of this process. We could do an interim report.

**Mr. Putz:** — Or is that going to be by news release?

**The Chair:** — For the public discussion? It could be by news release. These we could report on an interim basis to the House.

**Mr. Thomson:** — I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we may want to provide an interim report on what we have decided and voted on this morning, and await much greater detail once the work plan is devised by the steering committee. We may then wish to do a subsequent interim report.

**The Chair:** — Does that sound acceptable to the committee?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — When will these rule changes take place? Immediately upon the report being presented to the

House or . . .

**The Chair:** — Yes.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Okay.

**The Chair:** — Once the House receives a report, it's a done deal.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — There is no need for the House to vote on an approval of the changes? Or I'm not sure exactly what that process is.

**The Chair:** — Okay. A concurrence motion and the committee report? Okay. The House will have an opportunity to deal with . . .

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — . . . Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we would present an interim report with these items that have been decided upon at the earliest convenience, at your earliest convenience, and we'll vote it in the House; and that contrary to what I said earlier, we would work with you on some type of a release apart from this.

**The Chair:** — I'm informed that we will require subsidiary motions to present in the House with these recommendations of the committee.

Unless there's any further business that you feel we should attend to now, I entertain a motion to adjourn.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — What about planning the next meeting? Is that left to the Chair or to the steering committee?

**The Chair:** — The steering committee, I guess.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — I think we should leave it to the steering committee. Give us a chance to kind of mull these ideas over.

**The Chair:** — Motion to adjourn. Mr. McMorris. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 9:43 a.m.