

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges

DATE OF HEARING: 15 AUGUST 2019

MEETING STATUS: Public

LOCATION: LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

SUBJECT: WORK PLAN

COMMITTEE:

Hannah Bell, MLA Charlottetown-Belvedere [Chair]
Lynne Lund, MLA Summerside-Wilmot
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Donagh
Hon. Matthew MacKay, Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture
Gordon McNeilly, MLA Charlottetown-West Royalty
Robert Mitchell, Leader of the Third Party (replaces Sonny Gallant, MLA Evangeline-Miscouche)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Sonny Gallant, MLA Evangeline-Miscouche

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

none

GUESTS:

none

STAFF:

Emily Doiron, Clerk Assistant (Journals, Committees and House Operations)

Edited by Hansard

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m.

Chair (Bell): We'll call the Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges to order. Welcome everybody; great to see you all here.

This is the planning meeting for this committee and so what we wanted to do today was to sort of go through the mandate and we've got an agenda. If we can (Indistinct) start, the agenda was circulated in advance.

If I could have a motion to move the agenda as presented; or if there are any changes to that.

Ms. Lund: So moved.

Chair: So moved, Lynne Lund. Thank you.

You'll note on the agenda that we have consideration of the committee's work plan, as we actually do have private bills to be considered, which is a first for me, so that's going to be interesting; and then our new business.

I had circulated – or the Clerk had circulated on my behalf – kind of a reference piece for us to sort of perhaps begin or start with our conversation today. Obviously, from that, then we can talk about scheduling. (Indistinct) unlike from the other committees, I don't see that we are talking about a once-a-week meeting for this committee; we're probably more looking at two or three meetings before we go into the fall sitting. So, that's something we can also talk about in terms of what we're looking at for context.

The Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges is charged with the rules and standing orders of the Legislative Assembly, scrutiny of regulations, private bills, and the privileges of individual members and the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

The other context is that – and as I put in the notes that I'd sent out, is that this committee is one of the rare ones where recommendations from this committee when presented in a report to the House, if they particularly require a rules change, if that

report is adopted, those rules change to become effective immediately, which is what we saw with the committee rules change that we did in our last meeting. So it is a slightly different impact from this committee then it may be from some of the other ones and it's worth keeping that in mind for consideration.

Perhaps Emily's got the details on the private bills to be started.

Clerk Assistant: Sure. I just wanted to bring up to the committee that there have been a few inquiries about the process for private bills and that this committee does have private bills in its title.

Basically for a private bill, it's a bill that is very specific to a group or an association, hence why they're named private bills. What this committee does in relation to those private bills, is that after the first reading of the private bill, it's referred to this committee and this committee has to report back to the House on the admissibility of the private bill. That's kind of the process for that and it would be – later on we will have additional details on exactly what the private bills are, but I just wanted to bring it up that this committee is responsible in some part for moving those through the House.

Just to kind of keep on at the back of our, I guess, minds and I'll be kind of coordinating with anybody that comes forward who has those types of requests or inquiries about how the process moves through.

Chair: That would require a meeting of the committee during the sitting of the House in that case because it would need to be considered to go to first reading first in the House.

Clerk Assistant: That's correct.

Chair: Then to this committee and then back within the sitting period.

Clerk Assistant: (Indistinct) something to keep in mind as we move along this fall.

Chair: Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

Emily, do you mind giving just a bit of a background maybe for anybody that might be watching, or for our new members as well – we're not talking about private member bills here, we're talking about private bills and maybe even give an example of something (Indistinct) – might be (Indistinct) on the top of your head.

Clerk Assistant: Let me just take a peek (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: It's basically something that can't be brought forward by government, but has to be done through a private member and reviewed here first. Just a clarification that it's not like a government backbencher, an opposition private member bill.

Clerk Assistant: That is correct.

So we have in our House, three types of bills. There's the public government bills that are brought forward by members of Cabinet; private members bills which are brought forward by members that are not members of the Executive Council; and then we have private bills.

So for example, in the last Assembly we had several come forward. One was *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*. That's an example of a group that was incorporated through a private bill.

Yeah, so that's kind of – to make that to clarification that it's just affecting a specific corporation, or a group or Assembly.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

Chair: Were there any other questions from members on that?

So we are aware that we will likely have at least (Indistinct) during the sitting at that case; but prior to that, it will be great for today, would be if we could have a discussion from the floor on what we would like to see as our work plan. We have the opportunity to bring forward ideally, if we have something that we do want to discuss and bring forward recommendations in our report for this fall.

There has been a lot of conversation over the last few years about the need to update and modernize rules, particularly around the function or the structure of the legislative calendar and sitting hours and those kinds of pieces. Then there's another kind of day-to-day things that could also be considered.

What I provided members was – for the record – was there had been five different position papers or white papers that had been done or referred to in this House over the last couple of years, including one prepared by the previous PC caucus. One, called Modernizing the House, one provided by the Office of the Third Party at that time for a discussion in this House. There was also a really good discussion with the previous clerk here in the previous committee with Charles MacKay, of which we have a transcript. There is a federal reference document done by Michael Chong, and the very much-quoted Whose Job is it Anyway? report from the Coalition for Women in Government, which has been referenced, I think, more times than anything else in this House around this discussion.

What I did to sort of help provide some summary was go through all of those reports and look for recommendations that appeared more than once in any of those reports and things that have not already been done. We have already made some great progress with committee modernization, as we've seen, so that one didn't need to come in to here as much; but I looked instead for how can I pull some summary from this. If you give us a starting point, it's not meant in any way to tell the committee what it is that they're doing, but it's to give us some place to start a discussion from.

For the record, there are three different sections; there's a section on process changes, which are basically things that could be done internally around process; structural changes that are likely to require external consultation which could include the schedule and sitting hours; and policy recommendations that would come from this committee to another committee.

At that point, I'm going to stop talking and ask if there is any discussion or comments or anything anybody noted if they had a chance to look at this and if so, if there are any

comments they'd like to make at this time, about what they see as priorities.

Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: If you wouldn't mind – and it's really great for me to be part of the committee today. I am a fill-in today for Sonny Gallant who is attending the Acadian Congress (Indistinct)

But I did have a letter prepared, a written document for to be submitted with – I'll say third party potential request there, there are several pieces – I have a written document that will be distributed to everybody here today, although they're not on your list that you did provide earlier this week. These are just suggested pieces as well.

If you wouldn't mind taking a look at them – they have all sorts of things as the Public Law Review Committee, which I had put a motion forward during the spring session regarding more involvement for public after second reading on legislation so that Islanders can have a look at things to be more involved with.

We have another piece in there that looks at parliamentary control on over-spending which would deal specifically with special warrants and how they could be handled effectively throughout the whole Legislative Assembly. There's also some reference there too, as well, to some of the things that you have, I guess in (Indistinct) hours of operation, meaningful public budgetary inputs, mechanisms to provide opportunity for private members to advance a public debate, which we'll probably have some more discussion on.

It's just a lot of suggestion pieces that I'd like to bring forward.

But with indulgence of yourself and the committee, I would like, now that I'm here, to take the opportunity to read the first number of paragraphs as something of great importance as part of a Speech From the Throne piece, if that's okay with everybody.

Chair: Is everybody okay with that?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Mitchell: So, this is the first part as was addressed to you as Chair, Hannah Bell.

As the 66th General Assembly continues to work, the third party believes it's very important to undertake reforms to the Legislative Assembly that will encourage and permit greater public input.

For that reason, the following excerpt from the 2019 Speech From the Throne is particularly significant, which was written in the context of the recent debate over the recent electoral reform.

This is a quote: “Indeed, the illuminating recent debate over our democratic future revealed a desire to approach our democracy with an open and judicious mind and, while the question of changing to a system of proportional representation may not have reached the required threshold, there remains a degree of public support for reforms in the way that work is done in this Legislative Assembly.”

This is also a quote from the Speech From the Throne: “For that reason, Government will convene a panel made up of citizens and elected members to consider reforms to this Legislature. The goal will be to introduce constructive changes to the way public input is gathered by this Assembly – and new rules to govern the open transmission of information to Islanders. This exercise will begin within the next six months, and Government expects to table significant amendments to the Legislative Assembly Act within the next year...”

Of course, the Speech From the Throne was read on the 14th June 2019 of this year – so given those timeframes that were set out from the speech, this means that this reform exercise has to begin no later than mid-December of this year.

This provides government with only four months to obviously create a process to choose these citizens and elected members, whomever that may be, to serve on a panel which government has committed to with all-party support to begin work on a draft of a mandated work for that panel; design an approach research plan to inform the work of the panel; and begin work on a full public consultation process so that Islanders

have the opportunity to provide their views on this historic exercise.

Obviously, the government deserves great credit for bringing that forward in the Speech From the Throne and I thought this would be the place to bring forward to begin that work because, as I said, four months to do a significant amount of work now is quite daunting. I just wanted to have that on the record as something that's of real concern to the third party and we'd like to see that move forward and that would work along nicely with the motion that I brought forward earlier about involvement during reading of a legislation on second reading.

With support of the committee, I will forward those letters to the Clerk, who everybody can get a copy and look at those to add a suggestion piece – they're not – I'm not saying priority pieces – but they can be part of your work plan moving forward.

I thank you for allowing me to do that today; I did not intend to have the –

Chair: But you have the platform.

Mr. Mitchell: – occasion to do that. So I do, today. So thank you for that.

Chair: Thank you, Robert.

It's really interesting that you raised that point because I think – I'm really interested in hearing the committee (Indistinct) as the prep that Emily and I both did to prepare to come forward to provide some context for our work plan was very much around where is the public consultation in this.

One of the interesting things in that commitment that was made in the Speech From the Throne is that it has to fit within where the appropriate decision-making bodies can happen. We still have to be very careful that we are working within the structure of who is allowed to instruct the Legislative Assembly; and government can't instruct the Legislative Assembly and nor can the public, but we can provide a mechanism that this committee can be informed by that and then instruct.

That clarity is something that we have to be really careful of as well, but we had actually discussed exactly that, that we wanted to

bring as part of the work plan discussions was public consultation. So it would likely fit very well, but it's a really important part of commitments that have been made. So I appreciate you bringing that forward.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) always say from time to time, this, of course, is the people's House, so we want the people to be more involved in the process and all pieces that do go through the floor of the Legislature.

So I think this is timely, a great committee that's just getting formed and looking – and a good structure, too – so I think we can get some good work done there.

Chair: The other thing for the committee to consider in terms of work plan, is even though some of the things that we're discussing or could discuss in this committee, feel large, there is actually – because they are, and could potentially be impactful – the sooner we talk about them and get input on them, the sooner we're able to put processes in place that can impact.

Because for example, a change to a schedule that impacts budgeting can't happen next month or even next year, we'd be looking at 2021 or even 2022, and so we actually do need to do some of that work and discussion now, so this is the time to think about big things as well as small things in terms of potential work plan.

We've heard from the (Indistinct) and we'll look at that further.

Thank you very much for that.

Gord McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: I just want to add to – as a new member, I just wanted to see if we could get somebody to address this committee on – sooner rather than later, again, there is only four months to get significant progress on that, that motion would a witness – could we bring in a witness from the government side to either give this committee an update, or is it even in this committee's jurisdiction to hear a witness on this subject?

Chair: On which subject?

Mr. McNeilly: On what Mr. Mitchell just brought up about the document in the six-month timeframe that we have to – is this committee going to take the lead on supervising that, what we were just chatting about?

Chair: That would be up to this committee.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, so –

Chair: This committee is the only one that has that authority to actually recommend changes to rules in any aspect; and so, any rule change – whoever they come from – would have to come through here.

Mr. McNeilly: Sure, yeah.

Chair: The ones that involve expenditures would need to go through Legislative Management Committee, but it could be referred from here. So it really does come back to the question to the committee of what do you see as priorities that you would like to begin working on.

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

I think that's a great idea. The process that was begun to outline in the Speech From the Throne sounds like a good process. It sounds like it covers a lot of what we want to find out as well.

Having the citizen part of it I think is a good piece, but now it's not something we can do as a committee if we were going to go to public consultation, so I think it's a great suggestion that we – probably one of our first orders of business is to get the lead from government on that to come in and see how they see that process rolling out, and then as a committee perhaps we could say: Okay, that's something that we can take advice from or see what the results of that are and then bring it into our scope.

I think public consultation has to be a part of what we are doing if we're looking at significant changes, obviously, and hopefully good changes. We could just go out on our own and do a public consultation, but if there was a thought process from the government that they want to take on this part of it, we probably should find out how

much that scope looks like first before we go.

Am I making any sense at all?

Chair: Yes. Yes, you are; but, again, I need to clarify –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) that's for sure.

Chair: I just need to clarify, though, that it's this committee that makes the recommendations. It's not government that directs this committee.

Mr. MacEwen: Sorry, you misunderstood me. So –

Chair: We are the ones that would provide that direction as the committee, as the representatives of the entire government. So as a legislative committee, it's not an executive or a particular function of a particular department that would inform the focus or what we want to consult on.

That's my understanding. It is the function of this committee to make that decision. We wouldn't ask anyone else.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah, you misunderstood me. Of course, that's our role. We make those decisions; but if that process is going on, I guess I'd like to know what they intend to cover, how they're going to roll out, and we should absolutely be paying attention to that process so that we can use the information they gather if there's going to be public consultations. We should note that information so that we can make decisions and recommendations going forward.

Chair: Okay, so –

Mr. MacEwen: Would we not?

Chair: Right, so I think, or what I'm hearing, then, is I think we're probably both, I think we're all talking about the same kind of thing, which is this committee, particularly on some of the – we're talking about these larger pieces – should do that in consultation with the public.

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Chair: Our decisions should be informed by the public input, which means the committee

is the one that seeks public input. Right? Because it's, and then – but we still have to set context around what are we seeking public input on. Right? So that comes back to kind of what are the priorities for the committee, and then how do we then gather that –

Lynne Lund?

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Forgive my ignorance on this. As a new member, there's a lot I'm not entirely clear on. So when the government put this forward in the throne speech, what is their process for then gathering public consultation and how would that even work? Would that then come to this committee, or is it possible that they've already started some of this work privately that we are unaware of? Genuinely don't know the answer.

Chair: I don't know if we know.

Ms. Lund: Yeah.

Chair: We have examples for other functions where there is an advisory council or advisory board. For instance, there's a poverty advisory council which informs the department; but this, because this is about the function of the Legislature, it would have – a public consultation for this would have to come through this committee, not through government, because it is about the function of the legislative body, which is independent and non-partisan.

That would be my understanding, but I'd obviously like to speak – perhaps the clerk can, is there any clarification?

Clerk Assistant: Interject in that?

Chair: Yeah.

Clerk Assistant: Since you mentioned advisory councils, you might be able to see this committee as being the advisory council to the Legislative Assembly. So in the past when there have been rule changes, the committee has met, it's made its recommendations of what the rule changes should be; but that's reported back to the House, and then it's up to the House as a

whole to decide what to do with those recommendations.

Either they would adopt them, they could be sent back to committee for further consideration, maybe amendment, or they could be rejected. So this committee does make the recommendation to the Legislative Assembly on potential rule changes, but it is the assembly as a whole, all members assembled, to decide and adopt those particular reports.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Chair: Robert Mitchell?

Mr. Mitchell: – (Indistinct) members.

Clerk Assistant: That is correct.

Mr. Mitchell: At the end of the day, does this committee – what it looks like, how it gets structured, and the mandate of the work. So yes, I agree with that.

Chair: With that clarification – thank you, Emily – with that clarification, then, absolutely there's a place for us to, and we should – my personal feeling is we should seek public consultation in as many ways as we can do that, but it's the committee that decides what that context of that is, and how to do so, and then puts that back into that report or recommendations that goes to the members in the Legislative Assembly. That sounds right? Yeah.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Chair: Gord McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: So getting that, so we would take what was in the Speech From the Throne, and interpret that and do the work and present it back to the Legislature. So we're going to take a more active role with that. I think it's – is that what we're kind of getting at? We're taking what was in the Speech From the Throne and doing some work on that to outline how that process will work?

Chair: Well, if we look back to the document that Robert Mitchell tabled, there's some clear things in there, which is a commitment to have citizens as well as elected members be engaged in the

discussion of, and with all-party support, which is potentially represented here – that’s what we have on this committee – work on a mandate for the panel and appropriate research plan to inform the work of the panel.

That is effectively a work plan, and a mandate for when we go to consultation what are we asking, what is it we want this public consultation to be for, and when do we need it back. You know, it can provide us – in the same way we have for the committee.

I mean, it’s certainly – but there’s a lot of ways we can just get into the details and discuss how we do that, but as Robert Mitchell said, it’s great that there is a clear commitment from government to make changes, and to do so through a public discussion channeled through this space that we have, which is the structure that allows us to collate and collect that piece.

I mean, there are lots of ways that we can do consultation meaningfully, which include bringing in witnesses, as we do in other committees. It could be seeking written submissions as we do for the budget process. It could involve a panel of experts or of citizens and/or – but it has to come back through here.

Mr. McNeilly: And that’s – I guess I’m just getting at, I just don’t want – this is very important – I just don’t want it to get lost in translation, where is it the government going to take responsibility for the words that they’ve put in the Speech From the Throne, or are we going to help create an outline for them? Because I want to see the process move forward, and I don’t want, at the end of this, to have said: Oh, I thought you were going to do this. So we just want to make sure.

Chair: Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

I think there’s quite a bit in the works here. My suggestion we’ve talked about before, but actions speak louder than words: I think the committee needs to meet on a regular basis. You know there’s been a lot of issues in the past where people couldn’t make committee or ministers’ schedules interfered

and there’s a lot to work on here. So I think everybody, including myself as minister, has to commit that we put the time forward here. If we’re sincere in moving us forward in the timeframe we are, we all need to revamp our schedules and make sure we’re here.

So I would suggest we meet as soon as possible, once again, to proceed with this and keep a schedule ready at all times to keep moving this forward.

Chair: Thank you. That’s much appreciated, and that’s certainly what we’ve heard in the other committees that have been meeting, is there’s definitely an appetite to commit to work, getting work done, and that means meeting regularly.

I think I would come back to the committee again, if we can put aside for a moment that we know we want to do some kind of consultation, but I just ask the committee again in terms of some of the things that have been – and we’ve got some new things that are being brought forward as well – what are some of the areas or priorities that you feel should be on the agenda or considered in a work plan?

Lynne Lund?

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Just wondering, whenever we are making a work plan, what sort of timelines are attached to that?

Chair: They are whatever the committee decides.

Ms. Lund: When we’re making a work plan, I wonder, are we talking about what we’d like to get done in the next four years, or are we talking about what we would like to get done before the fall session?

I just think the length of our work plan and what we prioritize would be different depending on what kind of timelines we’re looking at. Does anyone have any input on that?

Chair: I can answer what we’ve done in other committees, which may provide some context, and certainly is that generally we do exactly that: what are things that we need to,

kind of foundational things that we need to talk about.

Some of it is understanding, and there's a lot of education in this committee, because it is about some deep dives into process; but we have two options or two parts. We have sort of things that we really feel are urgent that should be coming forward in the next sitting, which is in November, and then things that are ongoing, which would be ideally, yes, within that mandate of whilst this committee remains in this structure.

And as I mentioned earlier, there are some things that we need to work on now which won't happen right away just because of the impact and the complexity of them. Yeah.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

So can I assume that there will be other opportunities down the road to expand this agenda?

Chair: Yeah, absolutely.

Ms. Lund: This is not a finite –

Chair: A work plan is always a moving object. Other priorities may come up that we haven't previously thought of, particularly if we do public consultation. We've got a list here that has come from experts in the field, but perhaps we're going to hear something remarkable that just wasn't on the radar.

But what we can do initially is have a general discussion or agreement on what things we'd like to start with, so we've got something to focus on, and then always have that be able to be amended or updated as required.

Ms. Lund: Perfect, thank you.

Chair: Gord McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: If I could, I just might bring up something to add to the work plan at this time, so Emily might want to take these down for notes.

I know it's a responsibility of the house leaders to negotiate the length of time for each party, the allocation of, for to bring up motions and bills; but – and they did a good job of that in a difficult circumstance,

getting ready for the last sitting of the Legislature – I would like to propose that the expansion of a third-party role or with each of the parties getting more or less different amounts of seats that we look at – right now there's two 20-minute sections for the third party. I would like to think about and discuss turning that into a 60-minute block of time.

I do believe with six members, you could look at it as 10 minutes each per week where we have more of a block of time. I find that two 20-minute sections, you can't discuss bills, you can't bring – it's not easy to bring things to the floor, and so I would like to maybe put on there that I asked the committee to potentially look at additional third party time. I don't think it's too much to ask for an extra 20 minutes, potentially, to discuss, and making it a one-block time. So I'd like to see that put on the work plan and discussed.

Mr. MacKay: Big issue last year (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: I'm working in the present and the future, sir.

Mr. MacEwen: That's good.

Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lund: Out of curiosity –

Chair: Lynne Lund.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Would that not fall to the house leaders to renegotiate, or is that within the purview of our committee?

Mr. Mitchell: Can I speak on that?

Ms. Lund: Please.

Chair: Sure. Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Obviously, in the past it's always been a negotiation. When Peter was

elected as a third party representative, that was negotiated as well through the house leaders at the time. So I guess, from a third party perspective, maybe this is the time to formalize a process.

Obviously, the situation we find ourselves on the floor of the house today could become the new norm for many, many years, right? So it's about formalizing a process through the committee, that should be part of this, and all three house leaders are part of this committee, which signifies that this is, obviously, work that could be done collectively, all-party approach. Just look at the opportunity.

Again, I think – I'm not speaking for Gord, but this is a suggestion, as the previous written document is put forward, to at least begin talking (Indistinct). We could find ourselves in these situations for many, many years moving forward, or, you know, none of us have the crystal ball. So if it becomes formal, then it doesn't – it can reflect whatever the structure of how many seats what party has and give that some forward thinking and develop a plan that really gets the job done, allows people's voices, again, which is another concern that we want to bring forward.

Islanders have voted for something different. They want their voices heard in a different way, and this is another way of incorporating that into the work that's done on the floor. That's my point of view on it, just – and I'm not trying to put anything different from what Gord's bringing forward there.

Ms. Lund: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

Matt MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Certainly, I think great idea, any suggestions that are coming in, I'm wondering if we could get the list of everybody's suggestions that they would like to see on there and kind of go one down and prioritize them a bit that everybody has their input on and start picking them off one at a time.

Chair: That's a great suggestion. Thank you. Would you like to start?

Mr. MacKay: I'm (Indistinct) after reviewing everything that has – I'm good with all of these. So I guess maybe if the opposition or third party would have any more suggestions, let's get them out now, kind of get them wrote down, and then we can kind of talk through them to see which ones are –

Chair: (Indistinct) priorities?

Mr. MacKay: Priorities, yeah.

Chair: Great. Thank you very much for that.

Is there anything else we would like to be added to this, perhaps from Gord McNeilly?

Mr. McNeilly: I might add is that it's a request from this committee member to bring the Premier to the floor to discuss the Speech From the Throne early on in a meeting and outline what his vision is and when he did write that document, to discuss that, and let's get him out here and make a request to have him participate.

Chair: So I'll have that noted as part of a potential witnesses we'd be calling forward.

Was there any other additions at this point to the list that we have here? We also need to include the ones that have come through in the written submission today.

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Just as a clarification on the – when you speak about the context document that you and the clerk have provided, so this – the internal consultation, external consultation, and then the policy recommendations, this is something that you and Emily kind of come up with together to kind of summarize all those documents?

Chair: Well –

Mr. MacEwen: Is that how this was kind of come up with?

Chair: Yeah. We have just gone through, in terms of one of the sort of repeating themes that showed up across that kind of range,

knowing that not everybody wants to sit and read a couple hundred pages of –

Mr. MacEwen: No, understood.

Chair: – of white papers; but it doesn't mean in any way that it's a limited list or exhaustive list, but you know –

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah.

Chair: It was a starting point, I think; and I'll say there's some –

Mr. MacEwen: Because there are some that aren't on this, right?

Chair: That's right, yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah, so these – just to be clear, like, this – I don't know, is this a public document now?

Clerk Assistant: No. This was drafted in –

Mr. MacEwen: Oh, okay.

Clerk Assistant: – preparation for the meeting.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah, and it's a good summary, but there are a number of things that are not in it from all of these, obviously, because there's hundreds and hundreds of pages.

Chair: Yeah, and that's it.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah.

Chair: Again, that does not mean that this is prescriptive. This is knowing how what a fire hose of content it was, it was how do we begin to begin; and frankly, speaking to the piece around public consultation and discussion, there has been discussion around some of these piece in the public sphere as well. Petitions is one that we have heard about and have looked at what other jurisdictions have done.

And of course, our schedule itself has been a topic of –

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah.

Chair: – much discussion, so it's appropriate to put those pieces on, knowing

that they are not – these are not coming from an empty space.

Mr. MacEwen: Absolutely. Chair, I think our biggest challenge is, okay, is we don't want to reinvent the wheel, because there was significant consultation done with some of these things, the Whose Job is it Anyway? – obviously your office had done research into it, our former office had done research into it, the former clerk of the legislature had done significant research into it, and at some point all of these documents has had public reaction, discussion, too.

So it's how do we have a public consultation on these things to – you know, do we divide it up by some sort of, is it by internal consultation, external consultation and policy recommendations? Like, how do we go forward with the process, or do we just – do we need to come up with our own summary document, I guess, to say this is what we should go to the public on?

I mean, to me, right off the top I think legislative and committees schedule is one of the most important to me that I think we should be looking at, because I know it's something that's going to – sorry, I'll go back farther, say structural changes is something that I think that the committee should put at the top of the priority list, because it goes into this constant struggle we have every time we have a spring election, that basically our budgets are held up because we're debating the budget, whereas principals are waiting on staffing decisions.

There's a whole number of things that happens because of it. You know, the breakfast food program that was a subject of debate in the Legislature, those types of things get held up when we're in the Legislature, and then some of them can't be done because we're too far down the process.

So I think – and then we've had much discussion over the timing of when committees should meet, that kind of thing, so I guess I'll propose that structural change to the Legislature should be a priority that we get into as a committee.

Chair: Thank you for that, and I think the Clerk has an interjection.

I'll just add one thing as well, is that generally when you go to the public or you do some kind of consultation, you do provide some kind of focus. It's very difficult to say what do you think without –

Mr. MacEwen: I think we've already done that.

Chair: We have, we have.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Chair: And you're right, but there are certain witnesses that we can call to give us an update on the basis that we have an educational role for ourselves and for the people who may be sharing this, so those are useful; but when you go to consultation, you ask specific – you give a scope, you put a box around it and say: These are the things we want to seek your input on.

But the Clerk has a –

Clerk Assistant: Sorry, and I just want to interject.

Sidney, you said something – you know, this document is absolutely just a starting point for the committee, and that perhaps if the committee likes, it can come up with its own document, so it's a priorities document. I'm thinking like a page or two that would outline exactly what the committee is setting their priorities on.

If it's – you mentioned structural changes. So if the committee decided to go forward with that, what does the committee intend and would like to hear on, and then maybe from that a consultation plan and even a timeline could be implemented from the priorities that the committee as a whole sets, and that would kind of be the working document, if that's something that the committee's interested in.

But, yeah, this was just a starting point to gather the ideas to start; and you're right, there are a lot more that the committee could address.

Chair: Sidney, would that be the kind of thing you're thinking of, that we come out with a – and to Lynne Lund's point as well, that we have a work plan that is agreed by the committee in terms of getting some

focus and in terms of scope and priorities, but not excluding in any way the additional things that are going to get added to that list as we go on and as we hear?

Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Sidney had mentioned the budget cycles. That's one thing obviously in my new role as minister that I find very frustrating as well, so that would be something I'd like to see sooner than later.

As well as the sitting hours: obviously, anybody that's looking to get into public office, four years goes by quick, and election cycles, and I think we should make that a top priority as well, to see what we can do to improve the House if we're going to attract different people that want to get into public life. I think if we start at something like that sooner than later, instead of leaving that to the end; because anybody that is getting into public service, it's a big commitment, and there's a lot of things need to happen over the course of time, so I think that should be a top priority as well.

The only other thing that I hear quite often any time government has gone, or anybody's gone to public consultation, that a lot of people aren't aware of it; and I want to make sure when we're talking public consultation, that we really get out to the public to know what's going on, because a lot of people we hear back: Well, we didn't know anything about it, we didn't know anything about it. So I want to make sure we do a real good job of the committee to follow through with that.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Chair: Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: – (Indistinct) and I do agree with Matt. Oftentimes public consultation becomes: Oh, I didn't know about that. I bring that back to that document that I read earlier, and just the importance of involving the public, and if it's consistent and you know that there's a place where they can come, weekly or monthly, and they know where it is, and they know it's there all the time, I think that's really important, and that

– so I bring it back to the importance of getting moving with that committee.

Obviously, the throne speech said by December. I think that's really important that we can move forward with that, so that it alleviates that concern of Islanders that: I didn't know about that. If you know it's there, it's consistent, it's always at this particular time, and you can come or be part of that or get to be part of that, I think that's the goal that we're trying to achieve, and I thank you for bringing that up, because I think it just nails back to the importance of that work and getting that committee or the new structure in place within that short timeframe that was alluded to in the throne speech and by government.

So, thanks. I appreciate that.

Chair: Gord McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: It really comes down to we're talking about communication and getting the good work that's being done here out to the public and how we're going to frame that. In those respects, I would like to see a couple of things in here.

I would like to see more of a focus on us moving forward with technology. I just say that with – the Whose Job is it Anyway?, that report was done in 2009, so that's ten years. Technology moves incredibly fast, so there could be some modernizations that we can look at. Upon looking at that and making sure that that document stays current, and in terms of technology, I'm sure, I know I've read through it and it's a great document, but as well as we talked about there's some sections in here about getting, I think it's about getting to the people, and there's some stuff in here about constituency offices maybe moving forward in different regions.

I look forward to that debate, but also be in terms of I think that we can have a nice debate between using technology to get our message out, and becoming more virtual and more modernized in terms of technology in the Legislature or constituency offices, so I just wanted to add that as a reference point, too.

Chair: Thank you, Gordon. So you're speaking about discussing how the

Legislature itself, how we can provide recommendations that actually are about sort of getting better reach of the Legislature itself and the function that it does.
(Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, exactly, like meetings, and I know our people do a lot right now with a little in terms of technology, but maybe we could look at having better (Indistinct) because technology is not slowing down and it's always moving.

We have internet accessibility crises, potentially, in some parts of Prince Edward Island, so when that comes through, make sure that we're on top of things and that we're modernizing in that sense about getting our information out on what we're talking about in here.

Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

So hearing – okay, Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair. I want to – not second it, but what Gordon brought up about bringing the Premier and people in to speak about how that process rolls out. I know we don't – as a rules committee, we don't take direction; but I would like to know what that thought process is going to be to see what it's going to cover, because as we go forward with our consultations, I don't want to duplicate things that appear to be bipartisan and going down that road. So I think it's a fantastic idea to bring in to see where that process might go so that it can help inform our public consultation processes, so good suggestion.

Chair: Matt MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct) I would suggest maybe sooner than later we reach out to the Premier's office, just because I know he's got a busy schedule. If we send a request out sooner than later and get some dates back, that would work for him.

Chair: What I would perhaps – Emily is suggesting that one of the first priorities, given that we've got (Indistinct) discussion about today, is what we're hearing is the need for a communications plan, which includes sort of who we'd want to call as witnesses, but, and then also what does that consultation potentially, what's it meant to

achieve and who does it engage, and what does it need to look like.

So you have a recommendation?

Clerk Assistant: Yeah, so it seems that the committee has kind of identified some priorities on the list that we have presented today, so if the committee's open to it, I can certainly draft a committee priority document. I'm thinking, again, one to two pages kind of outlining what the committee really wants to look at; and then coming up with a public consultation and communications plan, so how the committee – and setting some timelines.

So how the committee would achieve their targets, what would need to be done in the next three months before the committee reports in the fall, what would the work be in the winter, kind of setting – and of course this would be subject to change, depending on what the committee hears: but it would be a starting point that we could kind of focus on and move and adjust from there as we move through the process.

Chair: Would that be acceptable to the committee, to give us some moving on from what we're talking today? So we have a proposed date for that, but what we'd looked at in the calendar was – to your point, Matt – was about the consistency in meeting space, and there are obviously a lot of meetings that happen that are already pretty regularly scheduled.

The space that we do have for this committee is Friday mornings, and if that would be acceptable to committee, we could actually meet on Friday, September the 6th, where we would be able to provide some materials in advance, but that would be the communications plan, and that would give us opportunity to follow up with the Premier, but also to come forward with some ideas about how and what we're actually rolling out, so perhaps committee members could have a look at the scheduling.

What I would also suggest is that we need to then talk about – perhaps today, before we finish today – just again going back through what other, what are some of those two or three top-priorities just to make sure we do have consensus on that, and what are you

hoping to be able to get to by the time we get back into that fall sitting? Because that is going to give us an idea of how many meetings we're going to need to have. I started out saying we're not going to need that many, but I'm hearing we might need to have a few more than I thought.

So what I am hearing is a really pretty clear commitment to discuss the structural changes around legislative sitting hours; the alignment of budget cycles, I think, is something we've heard pretty strongly; and the legislative and committee scheduling. Yeah?

We'd heard a thing from, also a comment around the importance of looking at how engagement and outreach could happen, including things like constituency offices and technology; and time allocation, which may well fit into that scheduling, because keep in mind one of the things we may be thinking about is fundamentally changing or increasing the number of hours that we sit in a different way, which could very much put the whole time allocation into a different box, but that needs to be considered.

Was there anything else at this time? I mean, I know we haven't had a chance to look at your submission, Robert, but that's a starting point. Would we be comfortable with maybe beginning with that for our communications plan and then adding others to that, that are longer-term?

Mr. McNeilly: I just –

Chair: Gord McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: I just might add one thing is I don't know about the rest of committee, but going around, when we get a chance to go door to door and talk to a lot of constituents at various times, and if you told them that you were on three or four committees, they wouldn't – a lot of them wouldn't know what takes place there.

So I was thinking around technology and stuff, it might be – we might talk about that the role of the Chair in various committees and the responsibility that Chair would have to do little reports or try to engage the general public around what's happening in their committees via social media. It might be a part of the modernization strategy. I

don't know if we would have to legislate it through this committee, but it might be something to add on to the role of the Chair of each committee to promote the activities and the discussion points in here.

Chair: Thank you.

If I could just add for the committee's consideration, there had been a – it is a small piece, but it's a process change – a request from Legislative Counsel for us to make a recommendation of a process to be able to withdraw bills, and this is purely a process administrative thing which has been a challenge in the past. We've all seen a bill #2 or #3, because bills can't actually be withdrawn once they've been tabled until there's a proroguing –

Clerk Assistant: Yeah.

Chair: – I believe. So administratively, it's a bit challenging, and so it's a relatively simple change but one that would make actually make it much easier for Legislative Counsel to be able to manage in the event that there is a reason why a bill needs to be withdrawn, that it doesn't then create challenges down the road.

So it's something that is small, but on their behalf I would appreciate it if we would ensure we fit that into our discussion, perhaps sometime this fall, should we have the opportunity, and that would –

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) the suggestion of Legislative Counsel or –

Chair: Yeah, it had come up during discussions with Legislative Counsel, just they would appreciate that opportunity; and it's a relatively simple rule change, but one that would just help the internal mechanism of the process.

Were there any other comments at this time? No? Look at us going in an hour.

So these are pretty big things that we've got to talk about, and it's really fantastic to hear such an appetite to do so. I think particularly, Matt, bringing up the piece around the budget, the impact, and Sidney, the impact of the budget cycles, that is an example of one where we can discuss it now and it may not be able to take effect right

away, but it is something that could actually really be of huge value to the functioning of government, so this is really impactful work that we're considering.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Chair: Go ahead, Sidney.

Mr. MacEwen: That's one aspect. We've heard lots of feedback on individual parts, but actually the structure of a – we've got a very unique spot here in PEI where we're relatively close together and we can call the Legislature together with ease rather than having to come from extremities of large provinces.

I think we could probably, going back to the democratic reform committee, where we had some really unique ideas come in from across the country on proportional representation and (Indistinct) like that, I bet you if we started looking at meeting for two weeks, one week off or three different sittings, or four different sittings, that kind of thing, I think we could probably get some pretty neat perspective if we call for that kind of input on how we could set that up and rolling into committees and more debate at second reading to the public, all those types of things.

My point is to Emily, the Clerk, is when you're drafting that communications plan, maybe right off the bat is calling for that as soon as we can, so that we can start digesting some of that stuff as we go out.

Chair: Perhaps one of the things, then, that we could request is that obviously there has been a lot of work done, but that jurisdictional scan, just in terms of examples of what other, more creative structures are out there, so we've got something to think about; and one of the fast ways that we can do an initial consultation from experts without having everybody have to come in one at a time (Indistinct) is to seek written submissions.

That's something you often see with the budget cycle is you, that people who have a vested interest or an expertise are asked to submit, do a written submission, and usually it's limited to one or two pages or something, but it's from your perspective as an expert.

So for instance, the Coalition for Women in Government, whom you'd mentioned as the author of the report, we could ask them for a written submission with their recommendation or perspective. There are a number of different groups that we could do that with. It would give us, again, to Sidney's point, a starting point of material to work with, because we're not looking at a blank page; and then, should we want it pursue it further, we can call them in as witnesses, which is what happens during the budget processes as well.

This is the federal process I'm speaking about but it's a very effective one, and that may be something that we could kick off pretty quickly after our September meeting to begin to collect that information. It doesn't mean we don't do any other consultation as well, but it really does focus a way for us to collect something in from those subject matter experts in the community, because they're very – I'm sure they're very keen to tell us what we think, so perhaps that's something we can bring forward –

Clerk Assistant: Definitely.

Chair: – as a proposal –

Clerk Assistant: I'll include that.

Chair: – for discussion at our next meeting, if that would be acceptable? Yeah?

Clerk Assistant: Sorry, on the cross-jurisdictional scan, is the committee looking for that information for their next meeting, or just at some point throughout the process this fall?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Ms. Lund: Also to Sidney's point, Chair, our province is unique, so even what is done in other jurisdictions may not be particularly relevant because we can get together more easily. So I wonder how much value that would bring.

Chair: We'll have to see, I guess.

Clerk Assistant: And if I may interject, it might be one of those things, where if we

get a response from across the country, we might start picking and choosing certain things that will kind of help us create or, I guess, envision, if we move forward with it, a schedule or the hours; but we wouldn't have to take every piece from one jurisdiction or the other. It would be kind of just supporting the work of the committee.

Chair: Yeah. As I think it certainly depends on your time as well, so – yeah, given that it's not actually that far way.

Clerk Assistant: Right. Well, I'll try to get it for the next meeting, but if it's not possible, it'll be here at some point, hopefully in September.

Chair: Okay.

So at this point, I don't know if we're able to say how many more meetings we would be committing to do; but if we could, to Matt MacKay's point, if we could consider leaving those Friday mornings potentially available, and then from the September 6th meeting we'd have an idea of what we're looking at for commitment.

If we – as we move into something like public consultation, by its nature it does slow down the process, but in a good way, so it may mean that we're not bringing forward finished recommendations in the fall, but that the process itself is being done appropriately, which I think it sounds like it's obviously as it should be much more important to the committee members.

Okay. Does anybody have any other additions or thoughts at this time on the initial discussion on priorities? A quiet bunch, good heavens.

So I think that's as far as we can move with discussion of scheduling at this time, but we're committed to that September 6th meeting, okay?

Thank you so much for your great feedback and input today. This is really very encouraging and exciting. Clerk, do you have anything to – no? We're good?

Clerk Assistant: No, this is great. Thank you, everyone.

Chair: Okay.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: So, move to adjourn?

Mr. McNeilly: So moved.

Chair: So moved, Gord McNeilly.

Thank you.

The Committee adjourned