



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Tuesday, March 12, 2013
6:19 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Quest, Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC), Chair
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W), Deputy Chair

Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Also in Attendance

Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (W)

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[Mr. Quest in the chair]

The Chair: All right. Well, we definitely have quorum. I hate to rush everybody, but I also hate to run too late, so we're going to get started and just welcome everybody here, members and staff, to this evening's meeting of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I call the meeting to order and ask that the members joining us at the table here introduce themselves for the record, starting on my right.

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek. Welcome as the new chair.

The Chair: Thank you. Welcome.

Mrs. Leskiw: Genia Leskiw, Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Jeneroux: Matt Jeneroux, Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. Fritz: Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross. Congratulations on your new position, Mr. Chair. It's good to see you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms DeLong: Alana DeLong, Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Pedersen: Blake Pedersen, Medicine Hat. Welcome, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wilson: Jeff Wilson, Calgary-Shaw.

Mrs. Towle: Kerry Towle, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Ms Jansen: Sandra Jansen, Calgary-North West.

Mr. Fraser: Rick Fraser, Calgary-South East.

Ms Cusanelli: Christine Cusanelli, Calgary-Currie.

Mrs. Jablonski: Good evening and congratulations. Mary Anne Jablonski, Red Deer-North.

Dr. Swann: Hi, everyone. David Swann, Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Brown: Neil Brown, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Dave Quest, new chair of this committee. We'll just watch for the others as they come in so we make sure that we introduce them for the record.

Microphone consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff. If you would keep the cellphones and the iPhones and the BlackBerrys off the table because I know this can interfere with the audiofeed. The audio of the committee proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded in *Hansard*.

Everybody should have a copy of the agenda. If you've had a chance to look at it, if I could get a motion to approve the agenda.

Dr. Swann: So moved.

The Chair: Dr. Swann. All in favour? It's carried. Thank you.

Also, in the packages that should have been printed off the website, you should have the minutes from the last meeting, which was on February 6. Of course, I was not here. If everybody has

had a chance to review the minutes, then I'd like to get a motion to approve the minutes of the February 6 meeting.

Mrs. Leskiw: I so move approval.

The Chair: All right. Mrs. Leskiw. All in favour? Carried. Thank you.

Okay. We'll get to the scheduling of the estimates. As you know, this has been a rather complex process just by its nature. I know it's been a lot of work trying to draft and redraft and redraft these to try and accommodate everybody's schedules and everybody's wishes. The latest draft, version 5, was printed off just a few minutes ago, so I'll give you just a minute to have a look through what we have in front of us here. It will be a total of 29 hours for this committee. We're going to spend a lot of time together.

Now, as the committee is aware, the recent changes to the standing orders included the addition under Standing Order 59.01(3), which states in part that

no later than 3 sitting days following the Budget Address, . . .
So here we are.

. . . the Legislative Policy Committees shall meet to determine a proposed schedule for consideration of the ministries' estimates that stand referred to them.

We're having this meeting today to discuss and decide on the amount of time the committee wishes to recommend for debate on each of the six ministries that are within our mandate. As noted in the standing orders, "the estimates for a ministry shall be considered for a minimum of 2 hours to a maximum of 6 hours." I was reminded this committee's mandate includes the ministries of Health, Human Services, Justice and Solicitor General, Education, Service Alberta, and Culture.

You've just been provided with the draft meeting schedule, and it sets out both our proposed length of time as well as the date and time proposed for the scheduling of each ministry that's within our mandate. I know there's been considerable discussion amongst the House leaders on the draft schedule. A similar schedule was discussed yesterday evening by the other two legislative policy committees.

I think at this point we'll just open the floor for a few comments on the draft schedule that's been circulated to the committee members. Assuming you've had enough time to have a quick look at it, we'll open the floor for some discussion.

Mrs. Leskiw: Could you just explain these names behind – like on Education. Is that just the opposition members that are listed there? Is that how it works?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Jablonski: Are they the only ones that have to attend, then?

The Chair: Well, they're the only ones that – I was going to say should attend – are required to attend.

Now, the meetings are open if any other members are interested in participating. I mean, they can't move amendments or anything like that, but they're certainly welcome to participate. We'll try and keep the process as open as we can.

6:25

Mrs. Jablonski: Can we get substitutions?

The Chair: Yes, you can get substitutions if you wish. That's 24 hours' notice for substitutions just as it's always been.

Mrs. Leskiw: I'm just looking at March 19 in the afternoon. Since that is the beginning of AAMDC, a lot of the rural MLAs are attending various meetings. I'm just wondering how that works if

we can't make it. How do you get a substitute when everybody else is at another meeting with someone else?

The Chair: Well, I would suggest probably an urban one in that case. I'm sorry. Which meetings are we talking about here?

An Hon. Member: AAMDC.

Mrs. Leskiw: I'm looking at March 19.

The Chair: Municipal districts and counties? Okay.

Mrs. Leskiw: Yeah. Education is in the afternoon from 3:30 to 6:30.

The Chair: Being as this is draft 5 – and I know this sounds somewhat harsh – this will have to prevail over other obligations while we're doing estimates, or you do need a substitute.

Mr. Anderson: I would just like to put on the record briefly that I think Mrs. Leskiw raises an excellent point. This is why the House leaders from the opposition asked, begged, pleaded, and everything else to the House leader to not put meetings for estimates in the mornings because, as everyone knows, we have so many meetings and things to go to and are also preparing for question period and the day's business. So it really is disappointing that that wasn't looked at.

My question, Mr. Chair, would be that I guess I don't understand. I mean, we have some meetings here that are concurrent meetings, and we had specifically asked the House leader not to make estimates concurrent. It wouldn't have required much. We've stuffed into 10 days the entire budget estimates, which I think, certainly, is the lowest of the major provinces. I'm not understanding why we couldn't have spread things out a couple of days to avoid mornings and then having to do estimates at the same time. It would seem that this is just an attempt to essentially subvert the estimates and the democratic process. Is there any wiggle room to alter that?

The Chair: Well, I wasn't, obviously, at the discussions amongst the House leaders. I know there were concerns about the morning, Rob, as you had indicated last night. Now, this schedule is also new to me, but it appears to me that we've only got the one morning. It is a Wednesday.

Mrs. Forsyth: No, three.

The Chair: Do we have two mornings? I'm sorry. What are the other ones now?

Mrs. Forsyth: You do have mornings, Mr. Chair, on the 20th of March. You have mornings on the 10th of April. You have mornings on the 17th of April.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. I'm just looking at this committee, then, Mrs. Forsyth, and I only see one now.

Now, the rationale was that there would be Public Accounts for a lot of our members on Wednesday morning, anyway. I realize it's not as long a meeting. Public Accounts and all other committee meetings will be suspended during the estimates process.

Dr. Brown, you had a question?

Dr. Brown: The question I had, Mr. Chairman, is that I noticed for the Service Alberta department it's shown as three hours down at the bottom there. I don't know what that means or whatever, but I noticed that on the 18th there are two hours allocated, not three.

Is that deliberate? What do the three hours entail? Is that somebody's recommendation?

The Chair: They're broken it up into two different ones. It would have been determined at some point, I would assume, amongst the House.

Ms Rempel: I think that might be a typo. It was previously 7 to 10.

The Chair: It was previously the three? Okay. It may be a typo, or it may have been determined that the department only required two hours.

Dr. Brown: Okay. So it's two hours, then?

Ms Notley: If I could clarify, it is two hours. It was agreed to be two hours. It primarily comes from the fact that the House leaders were quite distressed at the notion of discussing, for instance, a \$13 billion Health budget in simply three hours and that kind of thing. So certain ministries are longer and others are shorter primarily on the basis of their size.

Dr. Brown: Oh, I understand that, but there's just a discordance between what's at the bottom and what's at the top of the page for March.

Ms Notley: How so for March? Oh, with the list. I see what you're saying.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm assuming that there's been an error.

Ms Notley: It has not changed.

Mrs. Forsyth: It was negotiated under the departments for three hours, and now Service Alberta is on the list as two hours. I think we need to get a clarification. My understanding is that it was originally negotiated for three.

I think, Neil, if I may, it might be a bit tight, but we need to check for sure. It's a good point.

Dr. Brown: Just curious.

The Chair: We'll just take a minute here.

Okay. All right. We'll get clarification on that before the end of the meeting.

Mr. Anderson: Just to be clear, these times weren't negotiated. I mean, we think that we need much more time than this to go over the estimates. Just to be clear, the placement and everything here was not negotiated; it was dictated. The government has the majority. Absolutely, they're able to act in this way, but be clear that the opposition did not agree to this schedule in any way, shape, or form. We were given the amount of hours. We were given the blocks that it needed to be during. Essentially, you know, I think I asked for one thing to be switched around for a scheduling conflict, and that's about the only input that was accepted.

The Chair: All right.

Mrs. Towle.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of the things that as a new member I guess I just need to understand is – it seems to me that we're talking about billions and billions of dollars. Health alone is a \$16 billion, \$17 billion budget, and you're allotted six hours except that in reality you're not given a full six hours. You have to share that time with opposition. You have to share the time with the government. In reality, six hours could easily be an hour and a half, for example. That's not a significant amount of time to really go

over a very significant budget to understand where the ministry is going with what they want to do, especially in a line-by-line option.

I attended the committee meetings last night, and I'm sure the answer will be the same tonight, that there's no room to move that, that really what we're discussing here is not up for discussion. You're going to tell me that there's no room to move those times.

I think it does need to go on record that these are significant budgets. Many, many other provinces take much more time than this. I understand that in the past years even, you know, this Legislature has taken many more than 10 days to do this.

The other part of it is that concurrent sessions are very, very difficult for a small caucus. Many of us are critics for more than one area. I don't want to speak for you, Ms Notley. These overlap. I mean, how are we supposed to do our due diligence plus perform House duty and, you know, be good legislators for Alberta if we're not even given the opportunity to act in a democratic way and look at these budgets in a manner that actually matters?

The Chair: Okay. Point taken.

In response to the first question about the amount of time for each ministry and the maximum of six hours, that is what was voted for and approved in the standing orders. So that will not change.

With respect to the overlapping – again, this is as new to me as it is to you – every effort was made to ensure that the critics for each party did not have to be in two meetings at the same time. Is that not the case, looking at this schedule?

Mrs. Towle: Well, for this committee maybe, but many of us alternate on other committees, and then they do overlap. We're not in the same boat. I can't imagine that Ms Notley isn't going to have to be in more than one place at a time.

Ms Notley: I think it's understood that I'm not going to be able to attend all of the meetings of this committee while also fulfilling my critic duties. I have, I think, six or seven different ministries that I'm a critic for, so I simply won't be able to be on this committee and also do all my critic areas.

My personal challenge is more days like what we see on Wednesday, where my critic area commences at 8 a.m. and goes until 10 in the evening because those are all my critic areas that run through the day. So in terms of having the time to prepare and engage in an informed and balanced conversation, you know, this is a hideous schedule.

6:35

We made it very clear that the mornings should never be used and that we should not ever see more than two ministries a day at the maximum. The notion of trying to cram all this into three weeks is utterly ridiculous and quite undefendable and entirely, I'm assuming, the direction of our fabulous, oh-not-so-transparent Premier. But we've also been told that we don't get a say in this. I'm going to put on the record that this schedule is something that we very emphatically as House leaders opposed, and we were told to pound sand. You know, we're here to put on the record that we think this is a very dysfunctional way to debate what the Premier has characterized as a once-in-a-generation budget.

Dr. Swann: I'd better add my words to the record, too. We're a caucus of five, and we have similar concerns. Frankly, if we're really trying to be inclusive of women in politics, this doesn't seem to be female-friendly, family-friendly. It's hard to understand and hard to justify, in my view, squeezing all of this into two weeks when we could all do a better job, I think, if we were better rested and had more time to prepare and had some important family and fitness time, that is totally impossible during these few weeks.

The Chair: Understood. Being fairly family-focused and fitness-focused myself, I understand exactly what you're saying. I think we all know that this time of year is not terribly conducive to either, but the standing orders are as they are in front of us, and we have to work within those.

I'm just going to let Parliamentary Counsel in here. Shannon Dean.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to clarify the question that arose with respect to the discrepancy for the time for Service Alberta. It is in fact three hours. I've got that confirmed.

Mr. Anderson: Just a point of clarification. We have a member that is the critic for Service Alberta who's also the deputy chair of another committee that will be sitting at the same time as he's supposed to be critic for Service Alberta. They're on concurrently. He's been told by yesterday's committee that they're going to be required to be there, so he as deputy chair will have to be at that meeting but also at the Service Alberta meeting. That's my understanding, anyway.

The Chair: I think in light of where we're at, we'll probably have to get him to get a substitute.

Mr. Anderson: We can't change this, then?

The Chair: Is that with the most current schedule, Mr. Anderson? Is that still his conflict?

Mr. Anderson: Service Alberta is on the 18th. Service Alberta was changed to the 18th. Okay. So it'll work. Sorry about that.

The Chair: Okay. That's fine.

Mr. Pedersen is next.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm also going on record that, being a new member, obviously, we all want to do a really good job here. The fact that there are so many meetings going on at the same time – I know I would personally like to attend many of the meetings just for an informational and learning experience, but the way it's set up, it's very, very limiting. Seeing that I think we have about 39 new members this session, it's a real detriment, the way this is set up. It's not set up to be a learning experience. This is set up to be an exhaustion experience. In that case, again, it's disappointing. Had it been done differently, I think it would have been a great attribute to all new members and those who are returning for the second time. For those who are experienced, hey, it's business as usual.

The Chair: Ms DeLong, did you have a question or comment?

Ms DeLong: Thanks very much. I just wanted to make a couple points, and then I'd like to review this so that we all try to understand this. First of all, I believe this is the first time that we've ever had departments that had more than three hours. I do believe that that is something that the opposition asked for, to have more time for, well, the bigger budgets that seemed to all fall on us: you know, Health, Education, Human Services. So I'm really glad to see that we've got six hours instead of three, which we've never had before.

The other thing is that it's pretty rare that we actually have a double-booking. It looks to me – now, maybe I'm wrong on this – that we have a double-booking on Monday afternoon between Treasury Board and Service Alberta. So there's a conflict there for a few people, but I'm sure that it can be worked around.

Then we don't have two in the same evening until April 8 and then again between Energy and Solicitor General. Is there another

one? Oh, here's another one on April 22. So the double-booking is pretty rare.

What I'd like to do is just go over this. I'm just going to read out what I believe is our schedule. Okay? Could we do that?

The Chair: In light of the time that we have, if you can do it fairly quickly, yes, but we have a number of speakers yet.

Ms DeLong: On March 18 we have Service Alberta. On March 19 we have Education in the afternoon. Then on March 20 we have Education in the afternoon. Then on April 8 we have Justice and Solicitor General in the evening. On Tuesday, April 9, we have Justice and Solicitor General in the evening. Then on Wednesday, April 10, we've got Human Services first thing in the morning instead of Public Accounts, which I think is wonderful, and then Human Services from 3:30 to 6:30 on that Wednesday. On the 16th we have Health in the evening, and then on the 17th we have Health in the afternoon. On the 22nd we've got Culture in the evening. Now, have I missed any?

The Chair: No. Our clerk has been following along. That is correct.

Ms DeLong: Okay. Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: All right. That was not a question, just a clarification.

Ms Cusanelli, did you have a question?

Ms Cusanelli: Yeah. I just wanted to weigh in on some of the comments that are being made around the idea of not having enough time provided in the scheduling. At this point I haven't heard anything that would make us want to modify, or change, the estimates calendar here. Three or four topics, I guess, were brought up. Comparing ourselves to other provinces when clearly Alberta is like no other province – the oppositions in other provinces are much larger, so I would venture to say that, for me, that's comparing apples to oranges. Truly, we need to be looking at the job that we signed up to do.

I don't hear, either, any legitimate conflicts in terms of the schedule itself. As for new members, well, we've all signed up for the same job, and part of dedicating ourselves to this task is going to be working within strict parameters and timelines, which I think we are all aware is part of what we do.

Lastly, the idea about women and families. While I appreciate that, I think we also need to extend that idea to the men.

The Chair: Agreed.

All right. I've got Mr. Wilson, followed by Mrs. Towle, followed by Ms Notley.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will point out that my hon. colleague to my right's last name is pronounced "toll." Just "toll."

The Chair: I should know that.

Mr. Wilson: I understand that these are nonpartisan committees, but I've got to be honest. It's very difficult to remain in a nonpartisan mode when I hear some of the stuff that's going back and forth here. I mean, obviously what we see here is that the House leader clearly – and I'll say it – misrepresented himself to the House as we were debating these standing order changes because he suggested: I can't see any reason why we'd need to meet in the mornings, but it'd be nice to have the option if we did, and while concurrent sessions aren't ideal, you know, we just need to have the option. Well, it's good to see that all of that was done in good faith.

6:45

Here we find ourselves having this \$40 billion budget. We're going to ram it down our throats. We don't have any input here at this committee as to what's going to change or what should change. Quite frankly, it's a blatant disregard for democracy. I'm sorry that those who are backbench PC MLAs don't feel the same pressure that those of us in the opposition do, but as lead critics in the opposition it is our job to hold the government to account. You may have to prepare a couple of questions – or maybe they'll be prepared for you – and I'm sure that that's going to be very stressful for you. I'm glad that you're ready for it, and this is the job that you signed up for. The reality is that, yes, we're here. We're going to fight through it because we don't have a choice. I just want to put it on the record that democracy is in action, and democracy is alive and well in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right. Point taken. But I would just like to clarify. We do actually have 29 hours in this room, and by the time you get to hour 29, you'll know. Having been in here before – actually, Ms Cusanelli is right – I don't recall ever having six hours for a department. Although it's not as much as I know many members would like, it is actually longer on the bigger departments than we have had in the past.

Mr. Wilson: May I respond?

The Chair: Of course.

Mr. Wilson: I do appreciate that additional time, and I do understand that that was negotiated in good faith with the House leaders. I think that it is a positive step forward. I certainly wasn't knocking that, but I do believe that compressing this into 10 sessional days is a mistake.

The Chair: Okay. Understood.

Ms Towle.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to say that I can understand that we're all here to do a job. There's no question about that. We all know what we got hired to do, and I can appreciate that. There are two points. The first one I find very interesting is that the hon. member to my left here – and I apologize; I can't remember what riding you're from – mentioned that this is the most amount of hours. We're very thankful for that because it should be given more hours. There's no question about that. I think everybody at this table appreciates that. What I found interesting is that what she said is almost word for word what was said at last night's committee, almost exactly. So I find that interesting, but I'm thankful for the extra hours.

The other part of it is – hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, I appreciate your comments. However, for us it is a different role that we play. We may have more than one critic area. For example, I am the critic for Seniors, but I'm the backup for Health. I am also the backup for Human Services and Education, so I'm expected to know all three critic areas and attend all three areas. That's no different than, I'm sure, the Liberal and the ND caucuses, where they're the lead critics, not backups. Our role is quite a bit different, and we're actually expected to ask the minister on behalf of the opposition for a significant portion of time.

You've placed great emphasis on the amount of time we're going to spend together, 29 hours. Twenty-nine hours is a long time, and if we don't have the time to prepare for that and the time to actually ask proper questions and address these ministries in a proper way,

that's doing a disservice to Albertans. Yes, we're all here to do a job, but we're also here to do a very good job.

The Chair: Ms Cusanelli, this is on this point?

Ms Cusanelli: Yeah. Just as a response, we were elected to do this job, not hired to do this job. Inherent with that is the understanding that we are here to serve Albertans. Again, my thoughts on this are that these are fine parameters, these are more hours than have been dedicated in the past. I think that if we are able to work collaboratively together, we will get to the end result. That end result is simply this: Albertans need to know where they stand so that they can continue with their planning, and they will not know that until this budget is passed.

The Chair: All right. Well, everybody has got an opportunity to express their views for another few minutes, and then we'll need to go to a vote.

Ms Notley: I'll try and do this concisely. First of all, just to put it on the record, I'm told by our leader, Brian Mason, that in the early 2000s the amount of time for ministries was varied, so in fact we did have a longer time for larger ministries in the past. Just to put that on the record, this is not some new, revolutionary change. It is certainly something that everyone agreed to. The Government House Leader did respond positively to the request on the part of the opposition members because we did all want to see it, so it was a win-win situation. But it is not a new thing, nor does it increase the overall number of hours that are dedicated to debating this budget, nor in any way, shape, or form does it represent an increase in the amount of time concurrently that we have to debate this budget. Quite the contrary. This is the most compacted debate of a budget that I've participated in in the four and a half years that I've been elected.

Certainly, having been through the budget process before – and I don't believe the Member for Calgary-Currie has been – I can tell you that it is a tremendous amount of work for opposition members. You are right. We were elected by Albertans to do a job. You know what our job is? It's to get information out to Albertans that the government, for political reasons, with the advice of its communications experts, which are extensive, would not necessarily bust right out there to Albertans with. You don't. That's the way it is. That's politics. It is our job as opposition to dig and to press and to get information out that would not otherwise be there. This is an extremely important forum to do that, and to negate the importance of it because we have fewer opposition members in this House than in other provinces is profoundly disrespectful to the role and also represents a profound misunderstanding as to what this process is for.

Now, as well, we are all elected. I'm part of a small opposition. I have six critic areas. I don't have Public Affairs people to write questions for me, nor do I have ministry officials to write questions for me. I have our very small staff and, frankly, the research that I do at night till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning to come up with questions. Quite honestly, when we do a good job on that – when we do a good job – which we try very hard to do, we do actually disclose important items that were not otherwise disclosed to Albertans, and that's when we're doing our job well. You need to know that. We are not being allowed to do our job well.

Now, going specifically to the issue of scheduling, as I said at the outset, we have very limited parameters within which we can ask for changes. I do want to give the Government House Leader credit for the fact that he made a couple of changes in response to concerns that I raised, and he does deserve credit for that. The point that we were making before and that I was making before is that those

changes are within these very limited parameters in that we've got to shove this all into this extremely finite amount of time.

Having said that, the specific concern that I have on this schedule, which I believe also is going to be a problem for Ms Blakeman, is that with the restructuring of environmental programs, a significant number of environmental functions being moved to Energy through REDA, as the environmental critic – and she's also the environmental critic – we're going to have a keen interest and need to be participating in the Energy estimates. Unfortunately, that conflicts with Justice and Sol Gen. We are both also the critics for that, so that's a problem. That's a conflict in terms of the critics.

As well, I just do need to put it on the record on behalf of our caucus of four that certainly we will be focusing our efforts as critics throughout this process, and there may be times when the committees meet where our members are not able to be here simply as committee members, where we sit and observe. Rather, we will be focusing on trying to get it together to engage in our opposition critic areas.

There was some suggestion that yesterday members of committees were told they all had to be there, and I'm telling you right now we won't be. We cannot be. If you are interested in extending this debate process another two or three weeks into a humane schedule, we certainly can try that. But given that we have to do most of our own research, we do not have time to sit here and listen to ministries that we are not critics for in lieu of doing our own preparatory work for the ministries where we are the critics. So just in case there was some thought of chastising us for not attending all of these committee meetings, know now that we simply can't do it.

The Chair: All right. That'll be your option.

Mr. Anderson, just a brief one.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. A brief comment. Further to what the Member for Calgary-Currie – it's her first time. We do have 30 hours of time, but of course, because it's a Q and A back and forth plus the statement they had, the government gets easily way over half of that time, in this case 15 to 17, 18 hours, and the Official Opposition gets about, you know, six or seven hours total of those 29 hours. So when you're going into a ministry like Tourism, Parks and Recreation, one you'll be familiar with, where you only have two hours, that means that the Official Opposition is going to get probably a total of 30 minutes. Given the award that you just won, that's not a lot of time to go through and get to the bottom of all of the waste in that department.

6:55

The Chair: Okay. We're going to . . .

Ms Cusanelli: I'd like to respond to that.

The Chair: In about 30 seconds, please, Ms Cusanelli, and then we're going to go to the vote.

Ms Cusanelli: Mr. Anderson, as long as we are going to be working in these committees in a collaborative manner, that kind of insult is really unacceptable. So let that go on the record.

Mr. Anderson: It is.

Ms Cusanelli: Secondly, I am the one who helped construct the budget for Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and I can tell you right now that 30 minutes will be adequate time. And don't scoff at me for that.

The Chair: All right, folks. We're going to cut it off there.

We're going to go to the vote on the hours per ministry, so I need a motion that

the Standing Committee on Families and Communities adopt the proposed time allotments for the 2013-2014 main estimates as six hours each for the ministries of Health, Human Services, Justice and Solicitor General, and Education; three hours for Service Alberta; and two hours for Culture.

Mr. Jeneroux has already moved the motion, so the motion is on the table.

Yes, Mrs. Towle, you may move an amendment.

Mrs. Towle: I would like to move that the motion actually be amended to allow for more time to debate the budgets in each of the department areas and increase the hours available for debate.

Ms DeLong: Which ones?

Mrs. Towle: All of them.

Ms DeLong: How long? Four hours, 10 hours, 20 hours?

Mrs. Towle: Well, that'll be up for discussion.

The Chair: Well, I'm not sure that it will be because it's in standing orders.

Ms DeLong: Have you got a motion on the table or not?

Mrs. Towle: Yes, I do. Then I'd like to move that all of the departments go to six hours.

If six hours is the max, then let's make them all six.

Ms Rempel: For the purposes of this committee, we've got Culture and Service Alberta.

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, I don't think it's within the parameters of the committee to make an alteration to the standing orders, and if the standing orders say a maximum of six hours, then I think we're bound by that.

Mrs. Towle: Right. It means that Culture and Service Alberta could move to six hours.

The Chair: All right.

Dr. Swann: Has she got a seconder, or does she need a seconder?

The Chair: She does not need a seconder. The amendment is on the table.

All in favour of the amendment? All opposed?

Mrs. Forsyth: Can we get a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: All right. We'll get a recorded vote. Okay. We'll go this way, starting with Mrs. Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: I will vote for her amendment.

Mrs. Leskiw: Against the amendment.

Mr. Jeneroux: Against.

Mrs. Fritz: Opposed.

Ms DeLong: Opposed.

Mr. Pedersen: For.

Mr. Wilson: For.

Mrs. Towle: For.

Ms Jansen: Against.

Mr. Fraser: Opposed.

Ms Cusanelli: Against.

Ms Notley: Very much in favour.

Mr. Goudreau: Opposed.

Mrs. Jablonski: Opposed.

Dr. Swann: In favour.

Dr. Brown: Opposed.

The Chair: The amendment is defeated.

Now back to the motion.

Ms Notley: Could I speak to the motion really quickly?

The Chair: I'm sorry; you want to speak to the motion, Ms Notley?

Ms Notley: Yes. We're back to the main motion, right?

The Chair: We're back to the main motion.

Ms Notley: I'm not sure. I can't really do it off the fly, but I haven't heard anyone really sort of respond to my concern about the conflict that two of the opposition critics have on Monday, the 8th of April. Is there willingness to respond to that conflict? I'm not wearing my reading glasses, but I think Justice and Solicitor General – is that us?

Mr. Goudreau: Yes.

Ms Notley: That is. Again, I don't know if it's possible for us to switch a different three-hour department into that slot – that's my concern – or whether we can move it to a different . . .

The Chair: Ms Notley, I think that will be applicable to the next motion. Right now we're just talking about the number of hours per ministry, so I would like to call the question on that.

Ms Notley: Oh, were you? Oh, okay. I'm sorry. I apologize.

The Chair: All right. All in favour of the motion? That was Mr. Jeneroux's motion. Opposed? That's carried.

Okay, so now to the next motion. Then, Ms Notley, maybe we can address your concern. I need a motion that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities adopt the proposed 2013-2014 main estimates meeting schedule for the ministries of Health, Human Services, Justice and Solicitor General, Education, Service Alberta, and Culture as revised.

Dr. Brown: I have a concern before we get to that, Mr. Chairman. As I understood, that motion was just passed. We agreed to put three hours for the department of Service Alberta.

The Chair: We did.

Dr. Brown: We've only allocated two hours in the schedule for the 18th.

The Chair: That was a typo. Ms Dean addressed that one.

Dr. Brown: Okay. So what is the actual time?

The Chair: It's three hours.

Dr. Brown: Okay. Is it 7 till 10?

The Chair: Seven till 10.

Dr. Brown: Okay.

The Chair: So who's moving that one?

Ms DeLong: I'll do it.

The Chair: All right, Ms DeLong.
Discussion? Ms Notley.

Ms Notley: Right. I mean, I'm just sort of looking at this with Mr. Goudreau, but I honestly am not in a position to sit here and try to change this. I'm trying to think. What are the other three-hour ministries that we have right now?

Mrs. Forsyth: Service Alberta, Transportation, and Enterprise and Advanced Education.

Ms Notley: No, in this committee.

The Chair: In this committee it's just Service Alberta.

Ms Notley: Just Service Alberta. So is that switchable, or is that a problem? Wasn't Service Alberta actually one that was already a problem? If I recall correctly, the Government House Leader had said that there is actually a problem with the minister's availability as it's currently structured.

The Chair: That wasn't part of the discussion.

Ms Notley: I'll have to check my e-mails on that. It's hard for me to do this on the fly. I'm making a point here that two opposition critics are effectively conflicted because of the movement of REDA into Energy. That's what I'm saying. I'm sorry; I didn't catch it before. I didn't see the conflict until now. I think that is a problem that needs to be worked out.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Notley: Yes, it makes it challenging, but again the challenge to making these things work is the narrow parameters within which we're trying to make everything fit. You know, we raised our objections to the fact that it's being done so quickly, but if doing it so quickly now means that critics are being double-booked, then that's a problem. I think everyone would acknowledge that REDA very consistently in its mandate, which reports through the Ministry of Energy, takes over a significant amount of the work of the ministry of environment in this upcoming year, so it would be quite inappropriate for us not to be able to participate in that debate.

The Chair: Sorry, Ms Notley. Can you just repeat that? That was on April 8?

Ms Notley: Sorry; I don't have my glasses on because I never remember to bring them.

Yes. On Monday, the 8th, we have Energy from 7 to 10, and then we have Justice and Sol Gen from 7 to 10.

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, you keep saying Service Alberta.

Ms Notley: What's that? Oh, no. The clerk was saying Service Alberta is the one other three-hour piece for this committee. It's this committee that can potentially fix the problem because we're voting on the schedule.

The Chair: Okay. If I'm reading this right, then, Mr. Mason is actually the critic on Energy. Correct?

7:05

Ms Notley: He is the critic on Energy, but as I just said, I'm the critic on the environment, as is Ms Blakeman for the Liberal caucus. What's just happened is that with REDA, which was passed in the fall, 80 per cent of the environmental protection work in the province has moved from Environment to Energy.

The Chair: All right. Well, I understand the concern, and I think the best effort has been made to co-ordinate this as well as it could possibly be co-ordinated. You're right. There are other considerations as such, but having said that, looking at the time, I'm going to have to put the motion to a vote.

Ms Notley: I'd like that recorded, please.

The Chair: Okay. We'll need a recorded vote on that motion. Does anybody need the motion repeated?

In that case, starting with Mrs. Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: I am opposed to the motion.

The Chair: Opposed? Okay.
Name and your vote, please.

Mrs. Leskiw: What is the motion?

The Chair: The motion on the floor is that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities adopt the proposed 2013-2014 main estimates meeting schedule for the ministries of Health, Human Services, Justice and Solicitor General, Education, Service Alberta, and Culture as revised, and that's including the revision of Service Alberta, from 7 until 10 o'clock on the 18th of March.

Mrs. Leskiw: Agreed.

Mr. Jeneroux: Agreed.

Mrs. Fritz: Agreed.

Ms DeLong: Agreed.

Mr. Pedersen: Opposed.

Mr. Wilson: Opposed.

Mrs. Towle: Opposed.

Ms Jansen: Agreed.

Mr. Fraser: Agreed.

Ms Cusanelli: Agreed.

Ms Notley: Opposed.

I just want to make note that this is the first time in the five years that I've been here that we have put the critics, not one but two, in this kind of conflict.

Mr. Goudreau: Agreed.

Mrs. Jablonski: Agreed.

Dr. Swann: Opposed.

Dr. Brown: Agreed.

The Chair: The motion is carried.

Okay. On to other business. One of the discussion items has been members participating in the meetings via teleconferencing. At the September 29 meeting of this committee there was a motion passed that members were able to participate via teleconference for the duration of the 28th Legislature subject to the proviso that the committee may require members' attendance at a particular meeting upon passage of a motion at a previous meeting, or to that effect. I'd recommend that the committee consider a motion requiring members or official substitutes to physically be in attendance for the duration of the committee's main estimates meeting schedule. We'll open the floor for a brief discussion.

The motion would be that

the Standing Committee on Families and Communities require that committee members, substitute members, or noncommittee members wishing to participate be in attendance for the duration of the committee's 2013-2014 main estimates meeting schedule.

I need a mover for that.

Mrs. Fritz: So moved.

The Chair: Mrs. Fritz. All right. Thank you.

Ms Notley: So can we have a discussion?

The Chair: We can have some discussion, absolutely.

Ms Notley: Is this a motion about saying that we not phone in?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Notley: Oh, okay. Fair enough. That's fine.

The Chair: And it's simply just for the estimates.

Okay. Any more discussion? I think everyone is going to be here, anyway.

Mrs. Forsyth: Can I just get a clarification on why we would bring forward a motion like that, even if it is estimates or not? The standing policy committee dealt with this motion when the committee was first established, that you have the opportunity to phone in. I mean, I can appreciate where you're going, but, you know, there are circumstances that happen, and there are some members that may not be able to be here physically. I just find that we're continually reminded about how we're moving forward by the Premier and we're doing things differently and we have to look ahead instead of looking back.

One of the things I'm struggling with, Mr. Chair, is the fact that I'm the deputy chair and none of this has been shared with me before walking into the meeting. You know, when the committees were established, it was under the Premier's direction that we were going to have more collaboration, more working together. None of this has been shared at all, and I understand that, but none of this had been discussed prior to the meeting. I think probably a lot of the discussion that we're having right now might not have taken such in-depth discussion if you and I had had the opportunity to discuss this and you could go back to your caucus.

It's just very interesting when we talk about open, transparent, accountable, and all of that, and then all of a sudden we come into this meeting. It just miffs me. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay. Well, point taken. I mean, the schedule was nine minutes old to all of us when we walked into the meeting. I

think that without the teleconference it's going to be a little less distracting, certainly as chair but for all of us, without people kind of coming in and out, the background noise from the calls and so on. We're all going to be here anyway.

Mrs. Forsyth: I need to make a comment on something. I am severely hearing impaired, and as someone who struggles with hearing with both hearing aids I am much more adaptable on a phone, where I'm not picking up all the sounds around me. I find it quite frustrating, actually. *Hansard* has been very, very good with the fact, and they've provided me with the hearing assistance in this room. I do much better if I'm on the phone, where I don't have all the people around me talking and the surrounding things like this. I just think, you know, when we talk about a government dealing with the disabled and things like that, you're cutting things off. It's entirely frustrating.

The Chair: Okay. Point taken.

In light of the time I'm actually going to call the question. I think we'll just do a recorded vote, the motion being to disallow teleconferencing for the duration of the estimates only.

All right. Mrs. Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, the government is making a huge error in this decision and is going to send a terrible message to the disabled people in this province who are hearing impaired.

I'm opposed.

The Chair: We've got ways to accommodate that, probably.

Mrs. Leskiw: Agreed.

Mr. Jeneroux: Opposed.

Mrs. Fritz: Agreed.

Ms DeLong: Opposed.

Mr. Pedersen: Opposed.

Mr. Wilson: Opposed.

Mrs. Towle: Opposed.

Ms Jansen: Agreed.

Mr. Fraser: Agreed.

Ms Cusanelli: Agreed.

Ms Notley: Opposed.

Mr. Goudreau: Opposed.

Dr. Swann: Opposed.

Dr. Brown: Opposed.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. The motion is defeated.

Okay. The committee will be advised of the dates of the main estimate meetings once the final schedule is tabled in the House.

All right. Motion to adjourn? Mr. Jeneroux. All in favour? Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 7:14 p.m.]

