

“The New Standing Orders at the Ontario Legislature – The Process of Reform & Perceived Effects”

by

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INTRODUCTION

While disagreement is a natural and expected factor in the relationship between Government and Opposition parties, the issue of Standing Order reform has historically created a unique type of conflict among the parties as they dispute not ideology or policy, but the rules by which the Legislature operates. This has proven true in nearly every instance in recent history in which the governing party of Ontario has reformed the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly. In each case, regardless of which party held power, the Opposition has cried afoul, claiming that the Government is acting out of self-interest and even undermining the democratic processes of the Legislature. Nevertheless, each Ontario Government in recent years¹ has introduced reforms to the Legislature's Standing Orders, and each time this has occurred, it has been met with strong resistance from the Opposition parties.

This essay will examine the most recent round of Standing Order reforms which were formally adopted by the Ontario Legislature in October of 2008, paying specific attention to the change which shifted the time of Question Period from early-afternoon to 10:30 a.m. This paper will be premised on the notion that the Ontario Legislature is the principal democratic institution in Ontario and as such, the Standing Orders (the rules which govern the Legislature) ought to exist in such a way which allows for the Legislature to function as efficiently, but also as democratically, as possible. Any attempt at reforming the Standing Orders should be undertaken with this in mind and it is important to examine whether the new Standing Orders of the Ontario Legislative Assembly achieve this goal.

Taking the above considerations into account, this paper will first examine the vital place of the Legislature, its Standing Orders and Question Period in Ontario democracy. Next, it will review the proposed reforms as well as the reasons advanced by the McGuinty Government in support of the changes. This will be followed by an examination of the process of reform, with attention being paid to negotiations among the House Leaders and input from internal stakeholders at Queen's Park (such as the Press Gallery). Arguably, since the Standing Orders affect all staff and members of the Legislature, the process of reform and final decision should take such stakeholders' opinions into account. Lastly, this paper will examine MPPs' and other stakeholders' perceived effects of the Standing Orders now that they have been in place for several months. This was carried out through interviews with internal stakeholders at Queen's Park, as well as through a survey which was distributed to all members.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ONTARIO LEGISLATURE TO DEMOCRACY IN ONTARIO

Few would argue with the assertion that the Ontario Legislature is the primary democratic institution in Ontario. It is where the 107 members elected by Ontarians gather to debate and exchange ideas, devise solutions to challenges facing the province, and represent the interests of their constituents. As stated by political theorist David Docherty, "Legislatures, and the men and women who serve in them, are at the very heart of Canadian democracy."² Dr. Graham White, another noted political scientist, echoes

this sentiment in *The Government and Politics of Ontario* in which he states that “The legislature – Queen’s Park - is perhaps Ontario’s most central political symbol. It stands as the embodiment of the province’s democratic values – the people’s representatives making laws in accordance with democratically expressed public opinion.”³

The Ontario Legislature performs a number of functions which are key components of democracy, including representing the people, holding the Government accountable, debating important issues, recruiting and training political leaders, and legitimizing and building support for Government policies.⁴ Docherty identifies three main functions of parliament – representation, legislation and scrutiny. Representation is achieved by elected members acting as agents of local concerns, as well as “trustees” in whom voters place a great deal of trust to make the right decisions on their behalf.⁵ Further, one of the most important features of a Westminster Legislature is the process of debating and passing legislation. As stated by Docherty, “the requirement that a bill pass through the legislative process is critical to good democratic process,”⁶ as it is where policies affecting the province are able to be debated, scrutinized and amended before passing into law.

The third and most important function of the Legislature in the context of this paper, however, is the scrutiny function. Scrutiny is the process by which the Government is held to account by Opposition parties and it is at the heart of parliamentary democratic systems of governance. As explained by Docherty,

One of the most critical functions of members of Parliament is to act as a watchdog on the government of the day...The legislature keeps the government honest, because the government is accountable to the legislature. Members of the legislature who are not in cabinet are charged with ensuring that the government acts properly, spends wisely, and meets the needs of citizens.⁷

White also emphasizes the important role the legislature plays in ensuring accountability of Government, and illustrates how it contributes to enriching democracy in the province:

Accountability means that the legislature requires the government – both elected ministers and their bureaucratic officials – to explain and defend its policies and their administration. In debating the issues of the day, the legislature brings new problems to public attention, educates the public about those problems and possible solutions to them, and permits the voters to assess the positions of the various political parties on the issues.⁸

While there are a number of strategies used by the Opposition to scrutinize the actions of Government, and therefore ensure accountability, Question Period is undoubtedly the most popular and well-known. As stated by White, “In terms of members’ attendance, media attention, and overall political import, question period is arguably the most significant proceeding of the Ontario legislature.”⁹ The attention paid to and great significance of Question Period is attributed to it being the only time that members of the executive are placed in the “hot seat” facing opposition.¹⁰

Question Period did not exist officially in Ontario until the 1970s¹¹, but its prominence in legislative proceedings has expanded to become arguably the most important time of the day at Queen’s Park, particularly for Opposition members. This is presumably because if one of the main functions of the Opposition is to hold the

Government to account, and Question Period has become the most popular and effective way of doing so, it follows that the time for oral questions is when the Opposition is able to perform its main function, and grasp the attention of the media and the general public while doing so. The importance of Question Period to Opposition parties can be seen in the fact that Opposition members devote disproportionately large amounts of their caucus resources to preparations for it.¹² Caucus meetings are convened in the mornings to devise a strategy for the line of questioning to be pursued that day, to discuss possible questions and to obtain advice from party advisors on strategizing. Following the morning meetings and during the time leading up to Question Period, most members spend their time researching and planning their questions, with the assistance of personal staff and caucus research staff.

However, despite the importance of Question Period as the main tool used by the Opposition in its scrutiny of Government, there have been criticisms advanced which question its actual effectiveness. Heather MacIvor, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Windsor, argues that while it was once a crucial mechanism of accountability, it has denigrated into a pointless verbal brawl which brings the entire parliamentary system into disrepute. MacIvor describes Question Period in the following way:

Party leaders posture and point fingers, spewing righteous outrage at each other like divorcing spouses. When government ministers aren't stonewalling, they're hurling accusations back at their tormentors. The unedifying spectacle resembles that great oxymoron "reality television": the ostensibly spontaneous remarks are scripted; the conflicts are staged for the cameras; and the vapidness of the dialogue hurts the brain (while the volume assaults the ears).¹³

While this may accurately describe many Question Periods, the fact remains that it is essential to the Opposition's ability to scrutinize the Government, regardless of the rather dramatic scenarios that can result at times. As explained by Docherty, the strength of our system lies in its requirement that the Government respond to unscripted questions, and such questions put forth during Question Period are what allow for true accountability.¹⁴ According to Docherty, "To say that some theatre is involved in question period is an understatement, but to suggest that the importance of question period is overrated is folly."¹⁵ White also acknowledges the significance of Question Period, stating that "However intended, though, opposition probing and criticism of the government, together with press follow-up, does constitute an important accountability mechanism."¹⁶

STANDING ORDERS & THEIR IMPORTANCE AT QUEEN'S PARK

The significance of the Ontario Legislature to democracy in Ontario, as well as the importance of Question Period as the main tool used by the Opposition in their role of holding the Government to account, is generally accepted and disputed by few. However, the Standing Orders of the Ontario Legislature occupy a less prominent and perhaps more foreign place in the broader, more familiar concepts of democracy and Government accountability. While many Ontarians know what the Ontario Legislature is and what types of business are conducted there, one would be hard-pressed to find an

Ontarian familiar with the Legislature's Standing Orders. This is unfortunate (although not unexpected) since the Standing Orders are essential to the functioning of the Ontario Legislature, as will be illustrated below. Before discussing these reasons, however, it is necessary to describe what the Standing Orders are as well as their purpose at Queen's Park.

Standing Orders are the set of rules which dictate how and when business is conducted at the legislature. They are, in effect, a means of micromanaging proceedings at Queen's Park, and are referred to as the "statute law of the legislature" by White. As explained by White, "Of the greatest practical importance for most House activities are the standing orders...These are the House rules that set out, often in some detail, the basic procedures which govern consideration of bills, rules of debate, times of sitting, order of business, question period and a host of other matters."¹⁷ As the governing set of rules of the Legislature, the Standing Orders apply to all 107 members, their staff as well as the staff of the Legislature, such as the Clerks, researchers, and librarians. Given that the Standing Orders dictate how and when all business is conducted at Queen's Park, they ought to exist in such a way which allows for the Legislature to fulfill its main purposes – representing the people of Ontario, creating and passing legislation, and holding the Government to account. However, the Standing Orders must allow the Legislature to function efficiently but not at the expense of the Opposition's ability to scrutinize the Government.

PAST ATTEMPTS AT REFORMING THE STANDING ORDERS – A PROCESS OF REPEATED CONFLICT

The process of Standing Order reform should be undertaken with the above considerations in mind. Not only should the Standing Orders be reformed with the interests of the Legislature as a whole in mind, but the process of reform should also be as inclusive as possible. However, an established process of Standing Order reform which is inclusive of the interests of all the stakeholders within Queen's Park does not exist, and the Standing Orders can be amended by a simple majority on a motion or a committee report. As stated by White, "it is generally accepted that their [the Standing Orders'] organic nature renders them immune to cavalier change, and indeed they are amended only after extensive consultation between parties."¹⁸

While this may be theoretically true, White's assertion is likely to be disputed by Ontario MPPs who have experienced the actual process of Standing Order reform in recent decades. The Governments of Bob Rae (NDP 1990-1995), Mike Harris (PC 1995-2002), and Dalton McGuinty (Liberal 2003-present) have all reformed the Standing Orders and each round of reform has been met with strong resistance from the respective Opposition parties. In each case, the Opposition parties, as well as certain members of the media, have claimed that the proposed Standing Order changes would damage the quality of democracy at Ontario's prime democratic institution. Also noticeable in each round of reform are complaints from the Opposition that the process of reform was not adequately inclusive. Thus, it begs the question whether one's position on Standing

Order reform is influenced by a genuine concern for the functioning of the Legislature, or by which side of the House the member sits on.

For example, when the New Democratic Government of Premier Bob Rae moved a package of procedural reforms in 1992, the goal of such reforms (according to Government House Leader David Cooke, NDP MPP for Windsor-Riverdale) was to improve the efficiency of the Legislature which was allegedly bogged down by “antiquated rules.” As Cooke stated in the Legislature when asked during Question Period about the package of reforms, “they will provide some guarantees that the government will have a better opportunity to get its legislation through the House.”¹⁹ However, Lyn McLeod (Leader of the Official Opposition and Liberal MPP for Fort William) argued that the changes proposed by the NDP would rob the Opposition of its duty and ability to “review the government’s plans, propose amendments and represent the views of Ontarians as we have heard and understood them.”²⁰ Furthermore, both Jim Bradley (Liberal MPP for St. Catharines) and Ernie Eves (PC MPP for Parry Sound) condemned the process by which the Standing Orders were being reformed and even hyperbolically termed the process “Gestapo.”²¹

Another example can be seen when the PC Government of Premier Mike Harris introduced new Standing Orders to help speed the passage of legislation. The changes were subsequently criticized as a means for Harris to skew “the rules of the legislature to fit his desires rather than public needs.”²² The controversial Standing Order change introduced by Harris stipulated that, if the Legislature resumed debate after 6 o’clock in the evening, it would count as a second full day of debate. Therefore, by changing the definition of a “sitting day,” the Harris government was able to lower the amount of House time required for debate on legislation. As David Christopherson (NDP House Leader and MPP for Hamilton Centre) remarked, “This is Harris playing God...He says that one day is really two days...Legislation looks and sounds like a blur as they whiz it through.”²³

As was the case with the NDP reforms, criticisms were also raised by Opposition parties about the process by which the Standing Orders were being reformed. Frances Lankin (NDP MPP for Beaches-Woodbine) raised the issue of process in Question Period on June 2, 1997 when she confronted Premier Harris with the following question:

We know what these rule changes are about...You're tired of hearing from people who don't agree with you, and we're getting used to that from this government. Minister, I put it to you that in the past, government House leaders have either tabled rule changes in this House or proposed them at government or at House leaders' meetings or at both, and there's been a process of negotiation. Why are you changing the process here?²⁴

It is clear from Ms. Lankin’s remarks that not only were the changes to the Standing Orders being hotly contested, but that the Opposition was also feeling excluded from the overall process of reform. Further, the above examples illustrate the point that within the last twenty recent years, it has become commonplace for Opposition parties to decry both the proposed reforms as well as the process of reform as undemocratic and damaging to the ability of the Opposition to fulfill its main function – holding the Government to account.

THE STANDING ORDER REFORMS OF THE MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT

It is in the context of the importance of the Ontario Legislature, Question Period and the Standing Orders, and a brief historical review of other recent rounds of Standing Order reform, that an assessment of the McGuinty Government's changes to the Standing Orders can now be undertaken. While previous amendments were made to the Standing Orders in reaction to alleged "stalling tactics" being used by Opposition parties and thus sought to improve the efficiency of the Legislature, this most recent round of reforms occurred against the backdrop of different circumstances. The process began in late 2007 when Lisa MacLeod (PC MPP for Nepean-Carleton) introduced a resolution to make the Legislature more family-friendly. As the youngest MPP in the Legislature with a young daughter, MacLeod found the schedule and general organization of the Legislature to be unaccommodating towards the needs of parents. For example, the Legislature regularly sat until 9:30 p.m. and lacked any form of child care. When speaking to her resolution in the House on December 6, 2007, MacLeod argued that "No one in this place, regardless of gender or political affiliation, should have to choose between being an effective representative in this place and being a good parent."²⁵

This push for reform initiated by MacLeod won broad support within the Legislature and led to the establishment of an all-party committee to "examine options to make family life easier for politicians with young children and, perhaps, lure more young parents into the field."²⁶ Most importantly, it caught the attention of Premier McGuinty and Government House Leader Michael Bryant (Liberal MPP for St. Paul's), who decided that it was an opportune time to begin the process of legislative reform, which had also been a part of the Ontario Liberals' platform during the 2007 election. Himself a father of two young children, Bryant appreciated MacLeod's frustration with the schedule as it existed, arguing "it's a killer for people who are trying to manage a family life and a legislative life with constituency demands."²⁷ Thus, the all-party committee was struck to propose and review suggested reforms. Ultimately, the Government released its set of proposed reforms to the public. The key change on which this paper will focus is the moving of Question Period to a fixed time in the morning, as opposed to at an unfixed time in the early afternoon as stipulated in the previous Standing Orders.

REASONS FOR REFORM – THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

While the process of Standing Order reform was initiated on the premise of making the Legislature more family-friendly, this was not the only reason legislative reform was undertaken. As Bryant explained during an interview for this paper on December 18, 2008, the previous Standing Orders were simply not making the best use of MPPs' time. The former schedule required the Legislature to sit Monday to Thursday from 1:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and again from 6:45 p.m. until as late as midnight on some occasions, with Question Period beginning at an unfixed time in the early afternoon.²⁸ According to Bryant, the night sittings in particular lacked any meaningful debate and were seen by many members as "punitive." Further, Bryant felt that under the previous rules, the entire morning and a significant portion of the afternoon were devoted to preparation for Question Period, by both Government and Opposition members. The

justification for moving Question Period to the morning, therefore, was that MPPs would be able to make more efficient use of their time if less of the day were devoted to Question Period and if night sittings were eliminated.

Thus, it was the Government's position that reforming the legislative schedule was an effort to better accommodate the needs of MPPs with children and to enable all MPPs to function more efficiently. However, it was also part of a broader goal to modernize the Legislature which many viewed as operating in accordance with arcane, out-dated rules with little relevance to the Legislature as an institution of the twenty-first century. As Bryant argued, it was "time for the Legislature to take lessons from other public institutions and the private sector that have already modernized, while we remain firmly entrenched in the seventeenth century."²⁹

Furthermore, in better aligning the schedule of the Legislature with that of the modern work world, the argument could be made that it would represent a significant step in attracting a wider range of people, particularly women, to a career in provincial politics. This would enrich democracy by expanding the pool of candidates and participants, who would presumably bring their diverse backgrounds and interests with them to the Legislature. Thus, the goals of making the Legislature more efficient and family-friendly were tied to broader aims of modernizing the Legislature and enhancing democracy by helping to attract more people to the profession. The fact that Standing Orders can play a role in achieving such important goals also underscores their often-underestimated importance in Ontario politics.

THE PROCESS BEHIND THE MCGUINITY REFORMS

The commitment by the McGuinty Government to modernize the Standing Orders initiated a process of reform involving many of the internal stakeholders of Queen's Park – Opposition members, Staff of the Assembly, members of the media and non-partisan figures like the Clerk. Outside academics were invited to participate in the process as well. As mentioned above, since the Standing Orders affect all members of the Legislature including staff, any process of altering them should be undertaken in a way that is inclusive of the needs of all participants. However, as illustrated in previous examples of Standing Order reform processes, Opposition members would disagree that prior reforms were considerate of the needs of the Opposition and the Legislature more broadly, and as will be demonstrated below, the most recent round of reform was no exception.

With respect to the process of reform, Bryant argued that he wanted to re-establish the "long-ignored" convention of reforming the Standing Orders through consultation, compromise and, ultimately, consensus.³⁰ Bryant said this was done through consultations with the Opposition House Leaders, Elizabeth Witmer (PC MPP for Kitchener-Waterloo) and Peter Kormos (NDP MPP for Welland), members of the Press Gallery and the establishment of an all-party committee to consider the reforms. It is Bryant's position that these consultations resulted in the Government making a number of concessions in response to concerns advanced by the Opposition and the media. For example, it had originally been proposed that Question Period start at 9:00 a.m. but after hearing concern from the Opposition parties that this would not allow sufficient time for

Question Period preparation, the time was moved to 10:45 a.m. However, members of the Press Gallery then argued that they would not have enough time between Question Period and their noon filing deadline to scum and file stories, so the time was again moved to 10:30 am to allow a half-hour between the end of Question Period and the reporters' noon filing deadline.³¹

Lastly, the establishment of the all-party committee to review the reforms can also be seen as an illustration of the Government's desire to make the process of Standing Order reform inclusive of as many interests as possible. The committee was established to facilitate "consultations and discussion"³² and acted as a forum for Opposition members, Government members, the Speaker, the Clerk, the director of broadcast and recording, as well as academic experts to express their opinions on the changes. Further, each party was entitled to call three "expert witnesses" whom they wished to have testify before the committee on the perceived effects of the Standing Order changes.

While this committee was established in an attempt to make the reform process more inclusive and to facilitate consultation, it was during these committee hearings that Opposition members made clear how exclusive and unfair they felt the process had been up until that point. Witmer argued "Regrettably, the changes to the standing orders came about without any negotiation with members of the opposition...there was no discussion, there was no debate, there was no opportunity for us to provide any input."³³ Furthermore, during an interview for this paper, Witmer stated that the Opposition parties first found out about the proposal to change the time of Question Period via a press release issued to the media by the Government. According to Witmer, this set a tone of mistrust under which the process of reform then took place since there had been no consultation with the Opposition prior to the announcement. Witmer characterized the process as a disappointment which lacked any spirit of cooperation, and felt that the decisions about the Standing Order changes had been made before the process of reform was even initiated. In her words, "it was a done deal."³⁴

Kormos echoed the sentiments expressed by Witmer during the all-party committee hearings. As Kormos stated on July 29, 2008:

[T]he New Democrats want to make it clear that we remain incredibly disappointed that when the standing order revision proposal was advanced by the government, it was done without any consultation, discussion or even notice to the opposition parties. The purported process of discussion with the government House Leader, Mr. Bryant, consisted of consecutive meetings that demonstrated themselves, after the fact, to have been but stonewalling on the part of Mr. Bryant and were a very clumsy effort on the part of the government to feign negotiation when, in fact, there was no negotiation.³⁵

Furthermore, Murray Campbell, a Queen's Park columnist for the Globe and Mail, stated during an interview for this paper that he did not believe the interests of the Press Gallery were adequately considered in the process of reform because the Government ignored the brief that the Press Gallery had submitted outlining its concerns with respect to the proposed changes.³⁶

It is clear from the comments of Witmer, Kormos and Campbell that despite Bryant's expressed desire to reestablish the convention of reforming the Standing Orders through consultation and compromise, the Opposition was dissatisfied with the way the process unfolded in practice. While concessions were made on the part of the Government (e.g. adjusting the start time of Question Period to better suit the interests of

the Opposition and the press and eliminating the proposed Monday morning and Friday sittings), the Opposition parties have remained adamant that the process severely lacked any true consultation or compromise.

CONCERNS ADVANCED BY STAKEHOLDERS OVER THE NEW TIME OF QUESTION PERIOD

One of the most interesting components to the most recent round of Standing Order reforms at the Ontario Legislature is the way in which internal stakeholders within Queen's Park emerged to attempt to influence the changes taking place. One generally thinks of the business which is conducted at Queen's Park as being carried out in response to stakeholders around the province who appeal to Queen's Park for action, but it is less common to consider Queen's Park as a place with its own set of stakeholders who set out to further their own interests within the Legislature. As was the case with the Standing Order reforms, a number of stakeholders within Queen's Park emerged and asked that the Government consider their concerns before proceeding with the reforms.

THE OPPOSITION'S POSITION

Regarding the issue of Question Period beginning at 10:30 a.m., the Opposition parties were united in their opinions on how it would affect their role within the Legislature. The fundamental concern advanced was that with Question Period taking place in the morning, the Opposition parties and their staff would have less time to prepare for Question Period and their ability to hold the Government to account would therefore be weakened. For example, during the all-party committee hearings, Witmer and Kormos both advocated for Question Period taking place after noon. As stated by Witmer, "the early start of question period really makes it difficult for staff and research and many other people to prepare properly...at the end of the day, if there is one thing that we would ask to be changed – we'll put up with all the rest – it would be bringing question period back to the afternoon at 1 o'clock."³⁷

John Tory, Leader of the Ontario PC Party, issued a statement on April 18, 2008 also outlining his concerns about the effects of moving Question Period to the morning. As Tory argued, "They have decided to hold Question Period, the one hour of the day when the government is most visibly held to account, at a time that gives the opposition much less of an opportunity to prepare, especially if there is an emerging story that day. They are limiting the opposition's ability to hold the government to account." Tory also explained why he believed the time of Question Period was being moved: "The 10:45 am Question Period is all about keeping the opposition as far out of sight as possible and muzzling the media...we believe what Mr. McGuinty and his government are trying to is to reduce accountability, put a gag on the media and generally grab even more control. This is wrong for democracy in Ontario."³⁸

The NDP were equally concerned about the effects of a morning Question Period on their ability to hold the government to account. As Kormos argued in committee hearings:

We believe that question period is the highlight of the parliamentary day and that it is best positioned at a time after the noon hour when it is more readily accessible by the public, both in person at Queen's Park and by the media, the press, as well as more readily accommodating hard-working staff of all three parties as well as legislative staff who spend most of their working day focusing on question period and the contents of question period.³⁹

Fellow New Democrat Andrea Horvath (MPP for Hamilton Centre) also expressed her party's concern about the earlier start time's effect on the health of democracy at Queen's Park when she argued in Question Period that:

The reality is that the most anti-democratic aspect of these rules changes is in fact the moving of question period to the 10:45 a.m. slot. The reality is, question period is the absolute, most important accountability mechanism in the British parliamentary system... the changes that this government is introducing, reduce the time for researchers and writers and staff to prepare opposition questions for question period. What could be more anti-democratic than that?⁴⁰

It is clear from the arguments of the PC and NDP representatives that having Question Period begin in the morning represented a perceived threat to their ability to hold the Government to account. Since scrutiny of Government action by the Opposition is one of the central components of a healthy democracy, this concern as advanced by the Opposition is valid and worthy of serious consideration now that the new time of Question Period has been in place for a number of months. For this reason, a survey was sent to all MPPs to determine their opinions on what the effects of the morning start time of Question Period have been, the results of which are analyzed below.

THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

Many of the reasons provided by the Government in justification of the earlier start time of Question Period have already been outlined above and are mainly related to improving the efficiency of members' time, modernizing the Legislature and increasing debate time. However, the Government also argued that the earlier timing would actually increase the opportunities for scrutiny of Government. With respect to availability to the media, Bryant argued that:

[A]ccess to the executive by the media will take place, obviously, before question period, during question period and, as is the tradition, in the scrums after question period. In addition to that, the executive will appear in the afternoons during routine proceedings, on the way in to routine proceedings and on the way out of routine proceedings, in addition to caucus and cabinet meetings, at which members of the executive council and MPPs will be available on the way in to those meetings and on the way out of those meetings.⁴¹

Bryant further argued that the increase in debate time would actually serve to increase accountability of the Executive. He also stated that under the new approach, Question Period would end in time for all three parties to participate in a debate afterwards, whereas under the previous time, stories would be filed immediately after Question Period with no opportunity for any of the three parties to fact-check and make counter

arguments.⁴² Further, just as the Opposition would have less time to prepare for Question Period, so too would the Government members and their staff, leading to less scripted answers and better accountability.⁴³ Thus, it was the Government's position that not only would the new time of Question Period enable members to make better use of their time, modernize the Legislature and increase debate time, but it would also expand opportunities for scrutiny of the Government.

THE PRESS GALLERY'S POSITION

The Press Gallery at Queen's Park plays a significant role in the scrutiny function of the Legislature and quality media coverage of Queen's Park events forms a core component of democracy in Ontario. As Frederick J. Fletcher argued, "the parliamentary ritual acquires its significance in large part from the public attention it gets, and this attention is conveyed almost entirely through the mass media, since few Ontarians attend sessions or read Hansard."⁴⁴ Furthermore, a significant portion of what the media reports on stems from stories which originate in Question Period. It has been estimated that four out of five stories filed by the Queen's Park Press Gallery originate in Question Period.⁴⁵ The significance of the Press Gallery to Ontario democracy is undeniable, but its emergence as a stakeholder within Queen's Park is somewhat problematic. The role of the press has traditionally been to report on what happens at Queen's Park, not to attempt to influence the way in which proceedings occur. Whether the emergence of the Press Gallery as a stakeholder at Queen's Park is legitimate is open to debate, but it certainly did add an interesting element to the process of legislative reform. Furthermore, the fact that members of the Press Gallery felt compelled to voice their concerns about a morning Question Period speaks to how serious they perceived the threat to the quality of their work to be.

Representatives of the Press Gallery were invited to testify before the all-party committee on July 29, 2008. The main concern they advanced was that the new time of Question Period would affect the quality of their news coverage for a number of reasons. According to Keith Leslie, senior Queen's Park correspondent with the Canadian Press, the concern of greatest significance to him and his colleagues was reduced access to cabinet ministers since under the new time, ministers come out of the chamber all at once and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays are rushing to get to cabinet or caucus meetings. The result, Mr. Leslie argued, was less access to the Executive and a more difficult time for reporters to meet their deadlines which, one can assume, would mean a decrease in the overall coverage of news coverage at Queen's Park. As Leslie argued, "there does seem to be near unanimous agreement [within the Press Gallery] that having it end near noon is the about the worst of all possible worlds."⁴⁶

THE POSITION OF POLITICAL COMMENTATORS

Various political commentators also had the opportunity to comment on the effects of the new timing of Question Period, including Dr. Graham White and Dr. Nelson Wiseman, both political science professors at the University of Toronto, as well as Paul Rhodes, a media consultant, former Queen's Park reporter and communications

advisor to Premier Harris. All three commentators offered differing opinions on the effects of an earlier Question Period. At one end of the spectrum was White who argued that “the proposal to move Question Period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the Assembly in performing one of its key functions, holding the Government to account.”⁴⁷ According to White, effective questions require planning, research and reflection which is difficult enough with Question Period taking place in the early afternoon, let alone in the morning. Much of the preparation that goes into Question Period, White argued, simply cannot be done the day before, for “Question Period’s effectiveness and its attraction to the media depends heavily on immediacy.”⁴⁸

Towards the middle of spectrum was the opinion of Paul Rhodes, who did not conclude one way or another whether Question Period beginning earlier was a threat to democracy. He recalled that when he was a reporter at Queen’s Park, Question Period took place in the morning on Fridays, and that the earlier start time provided more time to seek additional comments, video and overall, to build a better news item. Regarding the impact on Government, Mr. Rhodes argued that lunchtime would now be free for MPPs to meet with stakeholders, and that Government would also have less time to prepare prior to going into the House, thus reinforcing Bryant’s claim that an earlier start time of Question Period affects the Government in a way that increases accountability. Opposition researchers, Rhodes argued, would not have time to further a breaking story so the frequency of “ambulance chasing”⁴⁹ may decline. Furthermore, he argued that it would allow the Opposition Leaders to get out of the Legislature earlier and on to other work, thus improving their efficiency. In sum, Rhodes saw pluses and minuses for all sides but argued that the media would be the “winner” under the new timing.⁵⁰

Lastly, Nelson Wiseman found the arguments of the Government in favour of a morning Question Period to be “more persuasive and logical.”⁵¹ Wiseman disagreed with White’s claim that the change would hamper Question Period’s vibrancy or effectiveness, and stated that Kormos’ assertions that the changes would “disarm the opposition” or prevent the media from doing its job were overstated. In response to the claims advanced by the Press Gallery, Wiseman argued that “the public relies on the media for news of the Legislature, but this does not mean that the Legislature ought to bend itself to meet the media’s preferences.”⁵² Thus, the role of the media as a stakeholder trying to influence happenings within Queen’s Park was problematic for Wiseman. He also cited the 24-hour news cycle as a factor in making the timing of Question Period less significant, as important stories of interest to Ontarians can now be made available online at any time. Overall, Wiseman did not see the changes as representative of a threat to democracy, nor did he believe that they would restrict the Opposition’s ability to hold the Government accountable.

THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE NEW TIME OF QUESTION PERIOD

As illustrated above, a number of conflicting opinions were advanced as to what different stakeholders within Queen’s Park perceived the effects of a morning Question Period to be. The Opposition strongly believed it would diminish their ability to hold the Government to account; the Government believed it would improve members’ efficiency,

modernize the Legislature, increase debate time and expand opportunities for scrutiny by the media and Opposition; the Press Gallery felt that it would compromise the quality of media coverage; and political commentators were divided in their opinions and advanced claims supporting each position. Given these competing opinions on how a morning start time of Question Period would affect the Legislature, a survey was devised and distributed to all 107 MPPs in an attempt to determine their opinions of what the actual effects of the new time of Question Period have been, now that it has been occurring in the morning for a number of months.⁵³

OPPOSITION RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

Of the surveys sent to the Legislature's 35 Opposition members (25 PC and 10 NDP), 26 were returned, representing a response rate of 74.3%.⁵⁴ Of those, most Opposition respondents (20 of 26) indicated that they were "not at all supportive" of moving the time of Question Period when they first heard of the plan to do so. Further, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they felt the 10:30 a.m. start time of Question Period had negatively affected their ability to prepare for Question Period (24 of 26), and that it negatively affected their party's ability to hold the Government accountable (21 of 26). With respect to the latter issue, the remaining 5 members indicated that it had no impact on their ability to hold the Government accountable. Not one Opposition member indicated that the earlier start of Question Period had helped in this function. Furthermore, a large majority of Opposition members (23 of 26) indicated that if given the opportunity, they would revert back to the previous early afternoon start time of Question Period.

The survey also attempted to determine whether the new time of Question Period had had a positive influence on MPPs' abilities to carry out other duties. The hypothesis was that while members may dislike a morning Question Period, perhaps they feel the change has enabled them to more efficiently fulfill other MPP duties. When asked how they felt the change had affected their ability to tend to constituency work, 13 responded "no change," 6 responded "negatively" and 2 responded "positively." With respect to having sufficient time for legislative committee work, 9 responded "no change," 9 responded "negatively" and 2 indicated that the morning Question Period had "positively" affected their ability to tend to committee business. Regarding their ability to tend to personal/family matters, 6 responded "no change," 13 responded that the effect had been negative, and 3 responded it had had a positive effect. This is telling since one of the main justifications for reform was to make the schedule of the Legislature more family-friendly, and yet a majority of Opposition respondents indicated that the change actually had a negative impact on their family and personal lives.

Regarding Opposition members' ability to interact with stakeholders, 7 respondents indicated "no change," 15 indicated the effect had been negative and 1 indicated the effect of a morning Question Period had been positive. Furthermore, with respect to their ability to interact with the media under the new time, 9 indicated "no change," 11 responded that the new time had a negative impact, and two responded that it had a positive impact.

Lastly, when asked why they believed the start time of Question Period was moved to 10:30 a.m., many responses reflected an underlying mistrust of the

Government. For example, a number of respondents said they felt the change occurred to make Question Period less significant in the eyes of the media and public, while others said that it allows Cabinet to use the afternoons for photo-ops and announcements, thus giving the Government greater control over the day's messaging and pushing Question Period out of the afternoon and evening news cycles. Others argued that it was a strategy to intentionally limit the Opposition's ability to prepare for Question Period, thus allowing them to "avoid accountability," as one respondent remarked. A number of positive comments were also raised; for example, from one Opposition member who felt that the new time has caused the Opposition to rely less on the news clippings of the day, which they believed was a positive change. Overall, however, the responses and comments from Opposition members indicate that the effects of a morning Question Period have been negative.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

The survey sent to Government members was comprised of the same questions as those contained in the survey distributed to Opposition members, with the exception of one question.⁵⁵ Of the surveys sent to 71 Liberals⁵⁶, 36 were returned, representing a 50.7% response rate. From those returned, most members indicated that they were either "strongly" or "somewhat" supportive of the plan to move the time of Question Period when it was first announced (25 of 36). However, Liberal MPPs' answers to a question about how the new time has affected their ability to perform other MPP duties were telling. With respect to tending to constituency work, 19 stated that there had been no impact, while 13 indicated the new time had had a positive change, and 2 indicated it had negatively impacted this area of their jobs. Regarding their ability to prepare for Question Period, 27 stated that the new time had no impact, 6 stated it had had a positive impact and 1 indicated that it had had a negative impact. When asked about committee work, 23 indicated "no change," 7 indicated positive change and 3 indicated negative change.

Further, 17 Liberal MPPs stated that the new time had no impact on their ability to tend to family/personal matters, while 11 said the impact had been positive and 5 indicated the impact had been negative. With respect to interacting with stakeholders, 13 indicated "no change," 11 indicated a positive impact and 9 indicated a negative impact. In terms of interacting with the media, 22 indicated "no change" under the new time, 8 indicated that the impact had been positive and 3 stated the impact had been negative. Regarding whether the overall quality of debate had been affected by the earlier start time of Question Period, 30 answered that it had not had any impact, 5 stated that the quality of debate had improved and 1 said that it had diminished. Further, 27 Government MPPs indicated that they would not want to revert back to the previous start time of Question Period, 8 indicated that they would, and 1 stated that they were unsure.

As with Opposition responses, there were some noteworthy comments provided by Government respondents. For example, in support of their opinion that the quality of debate had improved with the new time of Question Period, one member wrote that there are less "flat" Question Periods because people are somewhat "fresher" for the earlier time. The same respondent also indicated that the Premier is now able to attend more

frequently, thus increasing access to and accountability of the Executive. Further, a number of respondents commented that they feel they are able to do more with their time in the afternoon and that meeting with stakeholders has become easier, thus supporting the claim that the new time would improve members' efficiency. However, one respondent noted that his/her commute in and out of Toronto now takes place at rush hour, their committee work feels rushed, and they are no longer able to tend to constituency work or stakeholder meetings in the mornings. The same respondent, in response to the question on why the change of Question Period was moved, wrote "to meet [the] personal agenda of others." This indicates that even in the Government caucus, there were conflicting opinions with respect to why the time was being changed. Finally, regarding family-friendliness, one respondent wrote that the change in the time of Question Period alone had no impact – it was the elimination of night sittings which they felt made the difference in improving time with family.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

Upon further analysis of the survey results, a number of broader conclusions can be made about the effects of the new start time of Question Period. Firstly, although the Standing Orders are supposed to exist in such a way which allows for accountability in the Legislature, a majority of Opposition members responded that they feel the morning Question Period has diminished their ability to hold the Government to account. The Opposition advanced concerns that holding Question Period in the morning would have this effect throughout the reform process, and according to their survey responses, their concerns have manifested themselves in practice. In addition to finding that the new time of Question Period hampers their ability to perform one of their main functions, the majority of Opposition members' responses also demonstrated that holding Question Period in the morning has either not impacted or negatively impacted their ability to tend to other MPP duties. Thus, survey responses indicate that the new time of Question Period has negatively affected the Opposition's ability to hold the Government accountable, and that it was not successful in enabling Opposition members to make more efficient use of their time.

Government responses to the survey paint a rather different picture. While most respondents were initially supportive of the new time and the vast majority does not want to revert back to the previous schedule, most responses also indicated it had no impact on the quality of debate during Question Period, nor did it positively impact their ability to more efficiently fulfill other MPP duties. For each category (i.e. tending to constituency work and committee work; interacting with stakeholders and the media; preparing for Question Period; and tending to family/personal matters), most respondents indicated that the morning start time of Question Period has had no impact on such responsibilities. Thus, Government members' responses indicate that moving the time of Question Period to the morning, over all, did not achieve its intended purpose of allowing MPPs to make more efficient use of their time, nor did it improve the quality of debate taking place during Question Period.⁵⁷

IMPACT ON THE MEDIA

Given the concerns advanced by the Press Gallery at Queen's Park in protest of moving Question Period to the morning, it was also necessary to obtain the opinions of journalists within the Press Gallery to determine if their concerns had come to fruition. This was done through interviews with Murray Campbell (a reporter with the Globe and Mail) and Jim Coyle of the Toronto Star's Queen's Park Bureau. During the interview with Campbell, he stated that his concerns about the damaging effects of a morning Question Period did materialize. While he acknowledged that his access to the Premier and cabinet ministers did not decrease, he argued that the quality of information he received from them had declined. His explanation for this was that under the previous time of Question Period, reporters could scrum individual ministers on their way into caucus or cabinet meetings. A minister would comment on a certain issue and reporters would then be able to ask the Premier to respond, who would have little (if any) time to react. This resulted in unscripted answers from both ministers and the Premier. Further, the Premier's and minister's comments may have been printed by the online media, stakeholders would respond, and by the time Question Period started, there would be a story that had been building momentum over the course of the day. However, Campbell stated that now the Premier schedules his media availability for 9:15 a.m., before anything has happened at Queen's Park. Campbell argued that this means there is nothing to "bounce off of him" and that the interactions seem staged and scripted.

Campbell did admit that it is somewhat easier for reporters to develop stories with the afternoons free, but qualified that claim by arguing that this likely only applies to print media as their deadlines are later in the day than online media. Further, in response to why he felt the Government moved the time of Question Period to the morning, Campbell echoed one of the main sentiments put forth by a number of Opposition members – that it was a way for the Government to more tightly control the messaging. In his words, it was so the Government could "have the last word," since now, if a story breaks in Question Period or in a scrum following Question Period, the Government has the entire afternoon to react.⁵⁸

Jim Coyle stated that he did not feel that access to cabinet ministers has decreased as a result of the new time of Question Period, but acknowledged that this may be because the Toronto Star holds a relatively large degree of clout around Queen's Park, so ministers generally make themselves available to him. He also stated that he has observed an overall decrease in interaction between other members of the press and cabinet ministers, and that less of that which comes out of Question Period is able to survive the news cycle. Coyle further argued that Question Period has diminished as the focal point of the day and that the change has meant less news emerges from it. Finally, Coyle stated that the earlier time of Question Period:

Is part of a package that combines to diminish news coverage of the place. The hour to 90 minutes before Question Period is now a dead zone that is almost totally ignored. The fact that the Premier has his avails [to media] at 9:15 a.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays ensures the house will be ignored those two days...the net effect of the changes is to make it, more than ever, a media corps that covers the Premier, his comings and goings and utterings and musings, rather than covering the Legislature and legislative process.⁵⁹

Coyle's comments certainly convey his perception that the quality of news coverage at Queen's Park has declined with the new time of Question Period. The comments of Canadian Press reporter Keith Leslie and Campbell indicate a lack of certainty with respect to the effects of the new time of Question Period on the media. During committee hearings, Leslie and Campbell were asked whether they felt that media coverage and analysis of Queen's Park had suffered because of the new time. Leslie responded: "I don't know that we would say it's suffered. It's changed..."⁶⁰ Thus, the comments provided by Coyle, Campbell and Leslie reveal that the effects of the change on the media depend on individual perception and perhaps indicate that more time and research is needed to make a more conclusive assessment of the impact a morning Question Period has had on the different forms of media at Queen's Park.

STANDING ORDER REFORM – THE NEED FOR A STRUCTURED PROCESS

The disputes which have taken place during each recent round of Standing Order changes highlight the fact that a structured and agreed-upon process for legislative reform must be developed according to which future reforms will be devised. As mentioned above, since the Standing Orders affect all members of the Legislature, they should be designed in a way which allows for the Legislature to function as efficiently and democratically as possible. However, recent reform processes have been characterized by a "zero-sum" mentality among both Government and Opposition members; there is a perception that any change that assists the Government necessarily harms the Opposition, and vice versa. As White argues, this attitude encourages members to view the process of parliamentary reform as an exercise in horse-trading; if the Opposition receives something, then the Government must receive something in return.⁶¹ With this type of mentality, partisan suspicions and a general mistrust of Government on the part of the Opposition impede the creation of reforms which are aimed at improving the overall functioning of the institution. As stated by White, "reform is hampered by an inability to look beyond partisan advantage to the improvement of the legislature as a whole."⁶²

It would seem that for meaningful reform aimed at improving the health of the Legislature to occur, either consensus would need to be established in how the changes would exist, or partisan influences would have to be removed from the process entirely. A structured process for reform could first stipulate that authority over the Standing Orders remains with the House Leaders, whose responsibility it is to develop and implement House strategy, negotiate and consult on behalf of their parties, and orchestrate the operation of the House.⁶³ The Government House Leader could provide their proposed changes to the Opposition House Leaders who would then take the proposal to their respective caucuses to hear members' feedback and report back to the Government House Leader on the issues raised in caucus.⁶⁴

Negotiations among the House Leaders could then be undertaken with consideration being paid to the interests of Government and Opposition. Opinions from internal stakeholders within Queen's Park would have an opportunity for consideration by the House Leaders, since Legislative staff, the press, political staff and ministry staff can be equally affected by changes to the Legislative schedule. If consensus is not reached by the House Leaders, decision-making authority could be transferred to a neutral figure like the Speaker who would review the arguments advanced by each

negotiating party and make a binding decision taking all stakeholders' interests into account, as well as those of the Legislature as a whole.

Such a process would leave authority over the Standing Orders in the hands of the House Leaders, with whom it has traditionally resided and who would be responsible for reaching consensus regarding any changes to the rules. In theory, this is how the current process for reform exists. However, if consensus was not able to be reached, as has been the case in most instances of Standing Order reform, a simple majority would no longer suffice to have the proposed changes adopted and a neutral party would be charged with making the final decision. Such a process would provide greater incentive to the negotiating parties to reach consensus since their power to make the decision would be taken away in the absence of consensus, and the neutral party could very well introduce changes which none of the parties prefer. Furthermore, it would better uphold the principle of responsible government by ensuring that changes which the Opposition feels would weaken their ability to hold the Government to account not be introduced in the first place.

CONCLUSION

Much like previous rounds of Standing Order reform, the proposal to move Question Period from the early afternoon to 10:30 a.m. sparked a heated debate between the Government and Opposition parties, as well as other stakeholders at Queen's Park. The Government argued doing so would assist in allowing MPPs to make more efficient use of their time, while the Opposition parties unanimously agreed that it would severely hamper their ability to fulfill one of their most fundamental purposes – holding the Government accountable. Further, members of the media – a crucial component of democracy in Ontario – argued it would lower the quality of the news coverage they would be able to provide. Given these competing opinions on what the effects of a morning Question Period would be, a survey was distributed to MPPs and interviews were conducted with members of the media, the results of which have been analyzed above.

Responses to survey and interview questions indicate that the new time of Question Period did not achieve the desired outcomes advocated by the Government and that the majority of Opposition members feel that it has negatively affected their ability to hold the Government to account. Assuming that Opposition respondents were being completely honest in their answers (as opposed to letting partisan resentment over the change cloud their opinions) this represents a serious problem for the Ontario Legislature, for it can only function healthily – in a way that best serves the interests of Ontario – if it adequately facilitates scrutiny of Government actions by the Opposition. It would seem that having Question Period take place in the morning does not meet this requirement and perhaps a review should be undertaken to devise a new House schedule which better-meets the needs of the Opposition parties. This would likely see Question Period reinstated to its previous 1 o'clock timeslot, but with a fixed start and end time, something that many members advocated for in their survey responses.

Fundamentally, this study demonstrates the need to establish a structured and agreed-upon process by which future Standing Order reforms should be made.

Suggestions for how such a process might exist were outlined above, but the emphasis must be on encouraging consensus by removing the unilateral decision-making power from the Government and finding a way to exclude partisanship from the negotiations. As argued throughout this paper, the Standing Orders affect all members of the Legislature and as such, not only should they exist in a way which allows for effective participation of all members, but the process of changing them should be inclusive of the different interests of all members. A major step towards achieving this would be the establishment of a concrete process by which consensus is mandatory.

Reform of the rules by which the Ontario Legislature operates has occurred infrequently (its procedures scarcely changed from Confederation until the 1960s⁶⁵), and it has historically been cause for conflict among the political parties. However, as the needs of society and of MPPs change, pressure is placed on the Legislature to adapt in order that it “best meet the needs of a modern society and then, by extension, the modern member.”⁶⁶ As demonstrated in the above analysis, a set of procedural reforms were introduced in the Ontario Legislature under the justification that they would “modernize” the Legislature, and there is no doubt that the elimination of night sittings and beginning the procedural day at 9:00 a.m. represented significant steps towards achieving that goal. However, as conveyed through surveys and interviews, it appears that the new time of Question Period has both negatively impacted the Opposition and failed in enabling all MPPs to make more efficient use of their time. A structured and inclusive process for Standing Order reform must be established to enable the Legislature to adapt to the ever-changing outside world, but in such a way which allows for equal input from all members. Only then will the Legislature be able to best fulfill its key functions, and by extension, maintain a healthy democratic society in Ontario.

¹ With the exception of the Government of Premier Eves from 2002-2003.

² Docherty, David C. *Legislatures*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005. Pg. 3.

³ White, Graham (Ed). *The Government and Politics of Ontario*. 5th Ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Pg. 71.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Docherty, David C. *Legislatures*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005. Pg. 12-13

⁶ *Ibid.* Pg. 139.

⁷ *Ibid.* Pg. 16-17.

⁸ White, Graham (Ed). *The Government and Politics of Ontario*. 5th Ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Pg. 71.

⁹ *Ibid.* Pg. 96.

¹⁰ Docherty, David C. *Legislatures*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005. Pg. 12.

¹¹ White, Graham. *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pg. 96.

¹² *Ibid.* Pg. 99-100.

¹³ MacIvor, Heather. “Question Period: More Sound than Substance?” Spring 2008 – SIPP Dialogue

¹⁴ Docherty, David C. *Legislatures*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005. Pg. 178.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Pg. 95.

¹⁶ White, Graham. *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pg. 106

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Pg. 75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ontario, *Hansard*, June 25, 1992.

²⁰ *Ibid.* June 22, 1992.

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- ²¹ MacDonald, Adam. Evolution of the Ontario Standing Orders since 1985. *Canadian Parliamentary Review*. Autumn 2005. Pg. 36.
- ²² Sewell, John. Is Democracy Dead? *Eye Magazine*. February 8, 2001.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ontario, *Hansard*, June 2, 1997.
- ²⁵ Ibid. December 6, 2007.
- ²⁶ Ferguson, Rob. "High office and high chairs." *The Toronto Star*. December 31, 2007.
- ²⁷ Leslie, Keith. "Earlier workday proposed for MPPs." *The Globe and Mail*. February 11, 2008.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ferguson, Rob. "High office and high chairs." *The Toronto Star*. December 31, 2007.
- ³⁰ Interview with Michael Bryant, December 18, 2008.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Mitchell, Carol. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ³³ Witmer, Elizabeth. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ³⁴ Interview with Elizabeth Witmer. April 15, 2009.
- ³⁵ Kormos, Peter. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ³⁶ Interview with Murray Campbell. April 16, 2009.
- ³⁷ Witmer, Elizabeth. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ³⁸ Statement by John Tory on the Proposed Changes to the Standing Orders. April 18, 2008.
- ³⁹ Kormos, Peter. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ⁴⁰ Ontario, *Hansard*, April 16, 2008.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. April 17, 2008.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Interview with Michael Bryant. December 18, 2008.
- ⁴⁴ White, Graham. *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pg. 65.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. Pg. 107.
- ⁴⁶ Leslie, Keith. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ⁴⁷ Letter from Graham White to Howard Hampton. April 22, 2008.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ "Ambulance chasing" is an expression used to refer to reporters who attempt to find news once it has happened and use hearsay to report on the event, as opposed to actually being present at the event and reporting on it based on their own observations.
- ⁵⁰ Memorandum to G.P. Murray Research Limited from Paul Rhodes. February 20, 2008.
- ⁵¹ Wiseman, Nelson. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Please see Appendices A and B to view the survey which was distributed to MPPs.
- ⁵⁴ It is worth noting that a small number of the returned surveys were not filled out completely, which accounts for the totals in some categories totaling less than 26.
- ⁵⁵ Please see Appendix B to view the survey which was distributed to Government members.
- ⁵⁶ There are currently 72 Liberal members in the Legislature. However, Rick Johnson (MPP for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock) was elected in March 2008 and therefore was not surveyed since he has only been in the Legislature under the new schedule.
- ⁵⁷ It is worth noting that further research could be conducted with respect to how the morning Question Period has impacted the Premier and Cabinet Ministers specifically. Perhaps Liberal backbenchers do not feel that it has improved their efficiency, but the executive may believe that they are better-able to fulfill their ministerial responsibilities under the new schedule. Even if this was true, however, the fact still remains that the schedule of the House needs to meet the needs of all members, not just the executive.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Murray Campbell. March 17, 2009.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with Jim Coyle, May 15, 2009.
- ⁶⁰ Leslie, Keith. Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. July 29, 2008.
- ⁶¹ White, Graham. *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pg. 247.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid. Pg. 38.

⁶⁴ This idea was put forth by Elizabeth Witmer during an interview for this paper on April 15, 2009.

⁶⁵ White, Graham. *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pg. 225.

⁶⁶ Deller, Deborah. *Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly*. July 29, 2008.

APPENDIX A – OPPOSITION SURVEY

As you know, after a brief trial period, the Standing Orders of the Ontario Legislative Assembly were changed in October 2008. This survey attempts to determine MPPs' opinions of the new Standing Orders, with specific focus on the 10:30 am start time of Question Period. While answers to the survey will remain anonymous, responses will be analyzed for an academic paper, as part of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme.

The success of this research hinges upon the honest, frank and non-partisan opinion of MPPs.

Questions

- 1) Upon hearing of the proposal to move the start time of Question Period from early afternoon to 10:30 am, how supportive were you of this plan?
- a. Strongly supportive
 - b. Somewhat supportive
 - c. Not very supportive
 - d. Not at all supportive
 - e. Indifferent

Comment: _____

- 2) How has the 10:30 am start time of Question Period affected your ability to do the following?
- a. Tend to constituency work (positively/negatively/no change)
 - b. Prepare for Question Period (positively/negatively/no change)
 - c. Have sufficient time for legislative committee work (positively/negatively/no change)
 - d. Tend to family/personal matters (positively/negatively/no change)
 - e. Interact with stakeholders/interest groups (positively/negatively/no change)
 - f. Interact with the media (positively/negatively/no change)

Comment: _____

-
- 3) In what way, if at all, do you feel that the 10:30 am start time of Question Period has affected your party's ability to hold the government to account?
- a. Negatively
 - b. Positively
 - c. No impact

Comment: _____

- 4) If you had the opportunity, would you revert back to the previous early afternoon start time of Question Period?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Comment: _____

- 5) In your opinion, why was the start time of Question Period moved to 10:30 am?

APPENDIX B – GOVERNMENT SURVEY

As you know, after a brief trial period, the Standing Orders of the Ontario Legislative Assembly were changed in October 2008. This survey attempts to determine MPPs' opinions of the new Standing Orders, with specific focus on the 10:30 am start time of Question Period. While answers to the survey will remain anonymous, responses will be analyzed for an academic paper, as part of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme.

The success of this research hinges upon the honest, frank and non-partisan opinion of MPPs.

Questions

- 1) Upon hearing of the proposal to move the start time of Question Period from early afternoon to 10:30 am, how supportive were you of this plan?
- a. Strongly supportive
 - b. Somewhat supportive
 - c. Not very supportive
 - d. Not at all supportive
 - e. Indifferent

Comment: _____

- 2) How has the 10:30 am start time of Question Period affected your ability to do the following?
- a. Tend to constituency work (positively/negatively/no change)
 - b. Prepare for Question Period (positively/negatively/no change)
 - c. Have sufficient time for legislative committee work (positively/negatively/no change)
 - d. Tend to family/personal matters (positively/negatively/no change)
 - e. Interact with stakeholders/interest groups (positively/negatively/no change)
 - f. Interact with the media (positively/negatively/no change)

Comment: _____

- 3) In your opinion, has the quality of debate during Question Period diminished, improved or stayed the same with the 10:30 am start time?
- a. Improved
 - b. Diminished
 - c. No change

Comment: _____

- 4) If you had the opportunity, would you revert back to Question Period taking place in the early afternoon?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Comment: _____

- 5) In your opinion, why was the start time of Question Period moved to 10:30 am?
