



42nd Parliament, 1st Session

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

has the honour to present its

NINETY-EIGHTH REPORT

A PARALLEL DEBATING CHAMBER FOR CANADA'S HOUSE OF COMMONS

At its meeting on 7 February 2019, and pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(iii), the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (“the Committee”) agreed to study the concept and use of parallel chambers.¹

The parliamentary term “parallel chamber” refers to a formal forum that is subordinate to the main chamber where members of Parliament meet to conduct parliamentary debate and other business. Like parliamentary committees, parallel chambers are established and empowered by the legislature’s main chamber. A parallel chamber exists separately from the main chamber in its physical setting, but its business operates in concert with the business of the main chamber. In the case of Canada’s Parliament, a potential parallel chamber would serve as a secondary chamber to the House of Commons, and should not be confounded with the role, function and operation of the Senate.

The term parallel chamber may be used interchangeably with terms such as secondary chamber or alternate chamber.

Two Westminster-style parliaments have established parallel chambers: Australia’s House of Representatives established its parallel chamber, called the Federation Chamber, in 1994; and the United Kingdom’s House of Commons established its parallel chamber, called Westminster Hall, in 1999.² Among the common features of the Federation Chamber and Westminster Hall are that both have a low quorum (i.e., three

1 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Minutes of Proceedings](#), 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, 7 November 2019.

2 A description of the function and operation of these chambers is provided in this report’s Section B: Procedure and Practice of the Parallel Chambers in the parliaments of Australia and the United Kingdom.

members), only meet when the main Chamber is sitting, have a sitting schedule that is about one-third of the duration of the House’s weekly sitting schedule, do not allow votes, and operate on the basis of cooperation and consensus among political parties as to the business taken up in the chamber.

The Committee’s study on parallel debating chambers began on 28 February 2019. During its study, the Committee held eight meetings and heard from the following six witnesses: Mr. Bruce Stanton, M.P., Simcoe North; Mr. Charles Robert, Clerk of Canada’s House of Commons; Sir David Natzler, Clerk of the United Kingdom House of Commons; Ms. Claressa Surtees, Acting Clerk of Australia’s House of Representatives; Mr. Michael Morden, Research Director, Samara Centre for Democracy; and Mr. Paul Thomas, Senior Research Associate, Samara Centre for Democracy.

The Committee wishes to thank the witnesses for their invaluable assistance and thoughtful insights during this study.

A. PURPOSE OF PARALLEL DEBATING CHAMBERS

i. Background

A fundamental constraint on the work performed by legislative bodies is the finite amount of time that is scheduled for sittings during each year. Within this scheduled amount of time, a legislature must carry out a variety of activities and functions related to deliberating, legislating, and holding the Executive to account.

In recent years, the work carried out by members of Canada’s House of Commons has grown increasingly complex. Compared to a century ago, legislation has become lengthier, and more technical and complicated.³ In addition to their role as legislators, members of the House have also taken on an increasing number of time-consuming responsibilities, such as engaging in parliamentary diplomacy abroad and participating in constituency activities at home.

During the 42nd Parliament, the Committee has twice conducted studies and made recommendations about modernizing the procedures and practices of the House.⁴ The

3 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, Meeting 147, 4 April 2019, 1120, (Charles Robert, Clerk of Canada’s House of Commons).

4 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Report 11 - Initiatives toward a family-friendly House of Commons*, concurred in by the House on 4 April 2017; and *Report 48 - Services and Facilities Provided to Members of Parliament with Young Children*, presented to the House 30 November 2017.

objective of conducting these studies was to improve the efficiency, predictability and work-life balance of members, while retaining the long-standing conventions and traditions that are the foundation of a legislature.

In the Committee's Report 11, entitled *Interim Report on Moving Toward a Modern, Efficient, Inclusive and Family-Friendly Parliament*, which was concurred in by the House in April 2017, close examination was given to the parallel debating chambers in place in the lower houses of the parliaments of Australia and the U.K. The Committee weighed the potential benefits and challenges that could result from establishing a parallel debating chamber for Canada's House of Commons. In Report 11, the Committee made no recommendations regarding implementing a parallel debating chamber for the House, but left open the possibility that it could revisit the topic in a future study.

ii. Context in which Australia's House of Representatives established a parallel debating chamber

In 1993, Australia's House of Representatives instructed its Standing Committee on Procedure to study House procedures and practices with a view to recommending changes and improvements, and developing new procedures.⁵ The Committee on Procedure's first report adopted later that same year made recommendations meant to provide more time to members for considering legislation and to increase opportunities for members to contribute to debate on bills.

Members at that time were concerned about the number and size of bills being introduced each parliamentary session. This increase in the volume of legislation had reduced the amount of time available for members to effectively consider bills. Further, mounting legislative pressure resulted in the "excessive"⁶ use of government guillotine motions, a procedural mechanism that subjects debate on government bills to strict time limits. The Committee on Procedure's first report notes that in 1901, 23 Acts were passed following about 25 sitting hours of debate per Act. However, by 1992, 264 Acts were passed following about two sitting hours of debate per Act.⁷

In broad terms, three options were available to the House for increasing the amount of sitting time: add sitting days to the yearly sitting calendar, add hours to sitting days, or develop a second, concurrent stream for dealing with legislation. The latter option

5 Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Procedure, *About Time – Bills, Questions and Working Hours*, October 1993, p. iv.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

7 *Ibid.*

involved adding a newly invented parliamentary body called the Main Committee⁸ to the House's legislative process (note that in 2012, the Main Committee was renamed the Federation Chamber). Under this option, a bill could be debated in the main chamber and concurrently, another bill could be debated in the new Main Committee.

The report recommended that a Main Committee be created and that the House's legislative process be modified to allow certain bills to be referred to the Main Committee for debate at the legislative stages of second reading and consideration in detail.⁹ The report specified that bills could only be referred to the Main Committee following negotiation and agreement between political parties. The system would also be flexible and impose no obligation to refer legislation to the Main Committee.

The perceived potential benefits of establishing a Main Committee included:

- increasing the amount of legislation that could be dealt without increasing the number or length of sitting days;
- minimizing the need for the use of closure and guillotine motions; and
- benefitting members and ministers alike, without disadvantaging any party.

Following the adoption by the House of the Committee on Procedures' recommendation of a "two stream" legislative process, which included the creation of the Main Committee, the use of guillotine motions in the House dropped from 132 bills guillotined in 1993, down to 14 bills guillotined in 1994.¹⁰ This change was also partly attributed to other changes implemented at the time, including restructuring the parliamentary year and a practice of introducing bills with greater lead time before their passage was expected by the government.

8 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, Meeting 151, 30 April 2019, 1930 (Claressa Surtees, Acting Clerk of the House of Representatives of Australia).

9 The legislative process followed in the Parliament of Australia, while similar to the process used in Canada's Parliament, nonetheless differs slightly in its steps. For more information on the process in place in the Parliament of Australia, please refer to "[Chapter 10. Legislation](#)" in the Parliament of Australia's *House of Representatives Practice*, seventh edition. For example, in the House of Representatives, it is uncommon for bills to be referred to an investigative committee for study or consideration in detail after the second reading stage.

10 Surtees, 1905.

iii. Context in which the United Kingdom's House of Commons established a parallel debating chamber

In 1997, the United Kingdom's House of Commons struck the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons for the purpose of making recommendations about modernizing the practices and procedures of the House.¹¹

In Part II of its First Report, which was tabled in 1998, the Committee on Modernisation summarized how time constraints had adversely affected the effectiveness of the House in legislating, debating major issues and holding the Executive to account.¹²

The report stated that successive governments had complained that time constraints on the legislative programme had:

- Prevented the government of the day from introducing and enacting the full breadth of their desired legislative agenda and left insufficient time to bring forward uncontroversial measures and bills drafted by the U.K. Law Commission.
- Limited the House's ability to hold debates on topical issues of "burning importance," including issues of significance on the international, national and local constituency-level.
- Prevented the majority of select committee reports from being debated in the House. This despite the report stating that the select committee system was one of the most effective means at the House's disposal for scrutinising the Executive.

The Modernisation Committee described its 1997-1998 study as seeking to devise a "sensible and practical way" to ease the time constraints on the conduct of House business.¹³ Further, the Committee desired to strengthen the collective effectiveness of the House without weakening the constituency role of individual members.

Among the solutions proposed by the Modernisation Committee was for the House to consider establishing a parallel chamber modelled, in broad terms, after Australia's

11 Parliament of the United Kingdom, House of Commons, "[Terms of Reference](#)," Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, First Report, 2 December 1998.

12 Ibid., "[The Current Time Constraints](#)."

13 Ibid.

Federation Chamber. The Committee's first report suggested that the use of a parallel chamber could:

- reconcile conflicting time pressures in the House;
- allow members who wished to attend to debate matters that the Main Chamber usually did not have time to consider;
- allow for greater flexibility and scope for topics of debate, including both "confrontational and non-confrontational"¹⁴ types of debates; and
- provide more opportunities for members to raise issues of concern and raise them in a timely fashion, which would be more likely to attract media attention and present the House's work to constituents.

The Modernisation Committee noted that should extra time be made available as a result of establishing a parallel debating chamber, discussions would need to be held among all interested parties to decide how this extra time would be used.

The Modernisation Committee's first report did not recommend establishing a parallel debating chamber, even on an experimental basis. The Committee invited feedback from members about their views on the concept of a parallel debating chamber and how such a chamber might function in practice. These comments would aid the Committee to decide whether or not to further study establishing a parallel debating chamber for the House of Commons.

In May 1999, the Modernisation Committee tabled its second report, which recommended that a parallel debating chamber be established for the U.K. House of Commons on a provisional basis and subject to review and evaluation.

iv. A parallel debating chamber for Canada's House of Commons?

a. Potential benefits

Generally, the work performed by Canada's House of Commons and its members involves carrying out longstanding constitutional roles and responsibilities, while continuing to meet new and evolving expectations on the part of the public. In order to ensure that the House's work is carried out efficiently and predictably, and without unduly jeopardizing members' work-life balance, it is important for the House to reflect,

14 *Ibid.*

from time to time, on the suitability of the procedures and practices that govern the work of the House.

During its study, the Committee heard from Mr. Stanton that any decision by the House about creating a parallel debating chamber should be based on whether the addition of such a chamber would remedy a “reasonable need or short-coming with our current parliamentary system and procedures.”¹⁵ To that end, Mr. Stanton suggested the Committee examine the research conducted by the Samara Centre for Democracy on members’ parliamentary experiences, to gain a better understanding of where potential “gaps or areas of improvement could lie.”¹⁶

Representatives of the Samara Centre for Democracy appeared before the Committee on 4 April 2019. They told the Committee that in 2018, Samara had conducted an opinion survey of members of the House. Of note, Samara found that members considered debating policy or legislation to be the facet of parliamentary work where members felt they made the least impact.¹⁷ More precisely, the Samara survey found that two-thirds of the members who participated in the survey responded that they were dissatisfied with the state of debates in the House, while only 6% responded that debates, as parliamentary work, empowered them to influence policy or legislation.

The Committee finds these survey results troubling, especially considering that the House of Commons is the foremost deliberative body in the country. One of the House’s primary functions is to serve as a forum for debate. Moreover, the constitutional right for members to speak freely and for the House to arrange its business as it sees fit exists to ensure that members can engage in unfettered and efficient debate.

The Committee is of the view that a potential parallel debating chamber for Canada’s House of Commons could fulfill the following functions:

1. Increase time available for meaningful debate

Issue: A majority of members of the House of Commons have reported being dissatisfied with the state of debates in the House.

15 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, Meeting 145, 19 March 2019, 1105 (Bruce Stanton, M.P., Simcoe North).

16 Ibid.

17 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, Meeting 147, 4 April 2019, 1205 (Michael Morden, Samara Centre for Democracy).

Solution: A parallel debating chamber would expand the total amount of sitting time for the House of Commons while neither increasing the number of sitting days nor lengthening sitting days. By providing more total sitting time for the House, a parallel chamber would increase the opportunities for members to engage in meaningful debate and strengthen members' role as the voice of their constituents.

2. Increase number of private members' business items called for debate

Issue: Private members' business provides members with the opportunity to propose legislation on or raise awareness of matters of interest to them, their constituents and/or the general public. Under current procedures for private members' business in the House, however, in a Parliament lasting four years, only about half of backbench members are able to have an item of private members' business debated in the House. Some Committee members, especially those with long tenure in the House, have expressed frustration with the status quo.¹⁸

Solution: A parallel debating chamber could be devised to work, in conjunction with the main chamber, to move private members' business along more quickly in the House than under the current procedures.¹⁹ As a result, more private members' business could be considered.

The Committee acknowledges that in any given Parliament, it is not currently possible for all members to have their items of private members' business debated. The weekly sitting schedule of a parallel chamber could be arranged to provide enough time for every member of the House to have an item of private members' business debated during a four-year Parliament.

3. Increase and lengthen the time for Statements by Members

Issue: Under the Standing Orders, on each sitting day, prior to the start of Question Period, a 15-minute period is provided in which any member, except ministers, can be recognized by the Speaker to make a one-minute statement on virtually any matter. Given that the period for Statements by Members provides for about 15 speaking slots per sitting day, the result is that only a few members are given the opportunity to make

18 For example, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, Meeting 145, 19 March 2019, 1125 (Scott Reid, M.P., Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston).

19 Ibid.

a statement. The Committee finds this regrettable, as often members use their statement to call the House's attention to time-sensitive matters.

Solution: A parallel chamber could be devised to provide for a longer period for Statements by Members (i.e., longer than 15 minutes), longer statements by members (i.e., longer than one minute), or both. Should the period of time allocated for Statements by Members be lengthened, the rules for Statements by Members could be amended to permit ministers to make statements as well, provided that these are not related to their role as ministers. The overall result would be that more members could be able to raise matters of local, regional and national concern. Further, there is greater likelihood that these matters would be raised in a timely and relevant fashion. To echo the sentiment expressed by Sir David about his view of the U.K.'s Westminster Hall, there is no downside to increasing both the number and the length of speaking opportunities for members under Statements by Members.

4. Serve as a “proving grounds” for members, presiding officers and parliamentary innovations

Lastly, a parallel chamber could serve the function of a “proving grounds” for members, presiding officers and House of Commons staff. This would provide a benefit to the House as an institution without the need to make any changes to the current House procedures, practices and systems. The Committee heard testimony that a parallel chamber could serve as a proving grounds where new procedures could be tested, members could hone their debating skills and gain familiarity with parliamentary procedure, and newer presiding officers could gain knowledge of their roles and points of procedure.²⁰

b. Potential reservations

In considering the merits and drawbacks of establishing a parallel debating chamber for the House of Commons, the Committee remains mindful that some, if not many, of the current membership of the House may have questions and concerns about the role such a chamber could play and the potential negative effects and consequences that could arise by putting a parallel chamber in place.

Indeed, a written brief submitted to the Committee by the Samara Centre for Democracy on 18 March 2019, states that the 2018 Samara survey of members found that a plurality of current members opposed creating a parallel debating chamber. At the same

20 Stanton, 1105.

time, the survey also found that of the 11 proposed reforms listed in the survey, the creation of a parallel debating chamber received the second-most responses of “need more information.”

The Committee is hopeful this report will play a part in aiding members, current and future, to better understand the role and function parallel debating chambers have played in the lower houses of the parliaments of Australia and the U.K., and could play in Canada’s House of Commons.

The Committee heard that when the lower chambers of Australia and the U.K. first contemplated establishing parallel debating chambers, some members expressed concerns about the merit and usefulness of such a chamber. These included:

- general skepticism about the concept of a parallel chamber;²¹
- concern that debate in the main Chamber would be devalued by a parallel chamber;²² and
- concern that ministers would not enjoy appearing in the parallel chamber.²³

Further, Ms. Surtees told the Committee that an on-going consequence of operating a parallel debating chamber is that “[i]nvariably, having another debating chamber means there can be greater demands on a member’s time.”²⁴

c. The Committee’s viewpoint

On balance, the potential benefits of establishing a parallel debating chamber for the House of Commons outweigh the potential drawbacks.

The Committee repeatedly heard that following decades of experience with parallel chambers, the members of the lower Houses of Australia and the U.K. “overcame the early concerns and skepticism regarding [parallel chambers].”²⁵

21 Surtees, 1950.

22 Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, First Report, “[The Establishment of a Main Committee](#),” par. 93.

23 Surtees, 1950.

24 Surtees, 1950.

25 Stanton, 1105.

For example, Ms. Surtees said that the Federation Chamber has grown in authority over the years, and that its overall role “assists the House with not only its legislative function but also government accountability, ventilation of grievances and matters of interest or concern.”²⁶ Mr. Stanton said that the parallel chamber in Australia and the U.K. have “evolved into a permanent and valued part of its parliamentary institution, and it's noteworthy that their functions and the way they serve MPs and Parliament are somewhat different.”²⁷ Sir David told the Committee that Westminster Hall “has to my mind, no downsides.”²⁸

Therefore, the Committee recommends

That in the 43rd Parliament, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs develop a detailed plan for a provisional parallel chamber for the House of Commons and that the study commence within six months of the Committee's first meeting.

That the detailed plan developed by the Committee on the establishment of a provisional parallel chamber should include a process through which the Committee provides background material to all members of the House of Commons and solicits and receives their opinions.

That Public Services and Procurement Canada consider the resources required for the implementation of a House of Commons' parallel debating chamber.

That all documents, briefs and other materials prepared for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs during its studies of parallel chambers, and M-231,²⁹ which dealt extensively with this topic, in the 42nd Parliament, be made available for use by the Committee in the 43rd Parliament.

26 Surtees, 1905.

27 Stanton, 1110.

28 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, Meeting 144, 28 February 2019, 1105 (David Natzler, Clerk of the U.K. House of Commons).

29 On 11 April 2019, Mr. Frank Baylis, member for Pierrefonds — Dollard, gave notice to the House of Commons of private members' motion M-231, “Changes to the Standing Orders.” This motion proposed amendments to the Standing Orders to eliminate party speaking lists for use by the Speaker; amend the House's weekly sitting schedule; institute elections by the House for committee chairs; provide for a take-note debate to be held on e-petitions; create a parallel debating chamber; and increase the weekly hours for private members' business.

B. PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE OF THE PARALLEL CHAMBERS IN THE PARLIAMENTS OF AUSTRALIA AND UNITED KINGDOM

i. The Australian House of Representatives' Federation Chamber

a. Background

In 1993, the Standing Committee on Procedure of Australia's House of Representatives recommended that a parallel chamber be created to allow members to debate legislation in two concurrent streams.³⁰ The House adopted the Committee's report and recommendations, and the parallel chamber was created in 1994.

In 1995, the Committee on Procedure reviewed and made additional recommendations on the operation of the parallel chamber.³¹ In 1998, three-minute constituency statements and an adjournment debate were introduced.³² In 2004, the Standing Orders were amended to allow orders of the day for the resumption of debate on any motion to be referred to the parallel chamber. In 2008, grievance debates,³³ 90-second statements, private members,' committee and delegation business were added to the parallel chamber's responsibilities. In 2013, the processes for referring business to the parallel chamber were simplified.³⁴

In 2015, the Committee on Procedure reviewed the operation of the parallel chamber and concluded that it was a success and that it should remain as a permanent fixture of the legislative process.³⁵ The Committee found that the parallel chamber relieved time

30 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *About Time – Bills, questions and working hours: report of the inquiry into reform of the House of Representatives*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, October 1993, pp. 6-20.

31 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Time for Review: Bills, Questions and Working Hours -Report of the review of procedural changes operating since 21 February 1994*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, June 1995.

32 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Provision for Members to make short speeches in the Main Committee*, September 1997; House of Representatives Practice, 7th ed., "The Federation Chamber." Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2018, p. 790.

33 Grievance debates derive from the Westminster tradition that the House of Commons must consider grievances before granting supply to the Crown.

34 House of Representatives Practice, 7th ed, "The Federation Chamber." Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2018, p. 790.

35 Surtees, 1910; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *About time: Bills, questions and working hours: report of the inquiry into reform of the House of Representatives*, October 1993, p. 7.

pressure on the House and created additional time for members to participate in debate,³⁶ and that it had evolved with the needs of the House.³⁷

b. Procedure

The Federation Chamber is a parallel but subordinate body. It functions as a debating committee of the House, and allows for concurrent debate on limited types of business referred to it by the House. It does not hear witnesses or collect evidence, or make decisions that are binding on the House, and any substantive decisions it makes must be confirmed by the House.³⁸ The Federation Chamber's procedures largely mirror those operating in the House for the same type of business.

Federation Chamber business includes debates and amendments on bills referred to it by the House at the second reading and consideration-in-detail stages; private members' business; committee reports; and delegation business.³⁹ Several periods of time are reserved each week for Members to speak on topics of their choice, including constituency statements, 90-second statements on any topic of concern, adjournment debates, grievance debates, or the presentation of petitions.⁴⁰ The Federation Chamber may also consider motions referred from the House for debate, though it can only debate and cannot resolve them. At any time, the House may retract business that was referred to the Federation Chamber and return it to the House.⁴¹

The Federation Chamber meets in a dedicated committee room, designed like a small-scale version of the House and located in Parliament House. Seating is provided for 38 members, with additional seating for other members, spectators, media and advisors. The Federation Chamber may meet at any time during a sitting of the House, though the Federation Chamber generally does not sit when all or most members are expected to

36 Surtees, 1905.

37 House of Representatives Practice, 7th ed., "The Federation Chamber." Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2018, p. 791; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Role of the Federation Chamber: Celebrating 20 years of operation*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, June 2015, p. 19.

38 "The Federation Chamber," p. 791.

39 The legislative process in the Australian House of Representatives differs from the process in the Canadian House of Commons. In the House of Representatives, it is uncommon for bills to be referred to an investigative committee for study or consideration in detail at the second reading stage. Until 1994, the practice in the House of Representatives was for bills to be considered in detail by the committee of the whole, if they were considered in detail at all. House of Representatives Practice, p. 791; *About Time*, p. 7.

40 "The Federation Chamber," pp. 785-786.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 786.

be in the House. Over time, its hours of meeting have expanded. It currently meets every day the House sits, for 21.5 hours each sitting week.⁴² Debates are televised, and recorded in Hansard.

One important distinction is that the Federation Chamber operates on a consensus basis, and is designed to encourage cooperative debate.⁴³ While the Chief Government Whip is responsible for the Federation Chamber's agenda, business is generally referred on agreement between government and non-government members. Decisions in the Federation Chamber must be unanimous, or they remain unresolved and are referred back to the House. There are no recorded divisions. Its quorum requirement is three, which must include the Deputy Speaker (the Chair), one government member and one non-government member. The Federation Chamber is adjourned or proceedings suspended if quorum is not met, for disorder, to enable members to attend votes in the House, upon adjournment of the House, or on motion moved without notice by any member.⁴⁴

ii. The United Kingdom House of Commons' Westminster Hall

a. Background

In 1998, the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons tabled a report recommending the establishment of a "Main Committee" to provide an alternative chamber for debate, open to all members.⁴⁵ In 1999, a second report provided specific recommendations on the operation and procedures of a parallel chamber,⁴⁶ and Westminster Hall was created as a one-year pilot project. In 2000, a third report evaluated the effectiveness of the Westminster Hall experiment and recommended that it be extended into the next Parliament.⁴⁷ Westminster Hall became permanent in 2003. In 2014, a Modernisation Committee report reviewed Westminster

42 Surtees, 1905.

43 Surtees, 1910; [Infosheet 16 – the Federation Chamber](#), Parliament of Australia.

44 "The Federation Chamber," p. 782.

45 U.K. Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, [First Report](#), 1998.

46 U.K. Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, [Second Report](#), 1999.

47 Standing Order No. 10; The Committee found that Westminster Hall had given private members an additional 134 opportunities to raise issues with Ministers, and overall had increased the time available for debate. There remained a large demand for debate from private members. See Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, [Fourth Report - Sittings in Westminster Hall](#), 13 November 2000, HC 906 1999-00.

Hall procedures and recommended some improvements.⁴⁸ In 2015, a fifth report proposed Standing Order revisions to implement the agreed modifications.⁴⁹

b. Procedure

The House of Commons Standing Orders apply in Westminster Hall, with certain specific exceptions.⁵⁰ Westminster Hall is located in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons,⁵¹ and sits on the same days as the House.⁵² Debates in Westminster Hall are suspended to allow for members to attend votes in the House or the committee of the whole.⁵³ Debates are televised and recorded in Hansard.

The Backbencher Business Committee or the Liaison Committee set Thursday sitting agendas.⁵⁴ The Petitions Committee selects petitions or e-petitions to be debated on certain Mondays.⁵⁵ Debate slots on Tuesdays and Wednesdays are allocated by lottery to members who have proposed a debate topic.⁵⁶

Approximately 12 debates of 30-, 60-, or 90-minute slots are held weekly in Westminster Hall. Each debate is answered by a Minister.⁵⁷ Government departments answer debates based on a rotating schedule; members apply for a slot based on when the relevant department responding to their issue will be present. Shorter debates generally consist of a 15-minute statement by the member responsible for the debate, followed by a

48 U.K. Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, First Report – Business in Westminster Hall, 2014; Office of the Leader of the House of Commons, Government Response - Business in Westminster Hall Report, 2014.

49 House of Commons Procedure Committee, Fifth Report - Business in Westminster Hall: Government response and revised Standing Order No. 10, Fifth Report of Session 2014-2015.

50 Natzler, 1125.

51 Natzler, 1130.

52 U.K. House of Commons Standing Order No. 10(1).

53 U.K. House of Commons Standing Order No. 10(3).

54 U.K. House of Commons Standing Order No. 10(6).

55 U.K. House of Commons Standing Order No 10(1)(a).

56 U.K. House of Commons Standing Order No 10(10).

57 The U.K. *House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975* contains a list of all ministerial office holders who are entitled to sit and vote in the House of Commons and sets a limit on the total number of such paid ministerial office holders at any one time at not more than 95. The term “minister” has in general language a broader meaning in the U.K. than in Canada. For more information on U.K. ministerial offices, please refer to *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice*, 24th ed., p. 42.

15-minute response by the Minister.⁵⁸ In longer debates, the opposition party and the second-largest opposition also have reserved time slots.

Quorum in Westminster Hall is three. In practice, debates are usually attended at a minimum by the Chair, the member in charge of the debate, a member of the government and a member of the official opposition, as well as any other member who wishes to participate or spectate.

There are no recorded votes in Westminster Hall, and debates are essentially ‘take-note’ debates.⁵⁹ Since 2015, all debates in Westminster Hall are held on the general motion “that this House has considered [the subject of the debate]”, as moved by the member in charge of the debate (in U.K. practice, amendments may not be proposed to “neutral” motions, like these).⁶⁰ If a question is left undecided, it is reported as such to the House but there is no practical consequence.

C. HOW A PARALLEL CHAMBER COULD OPERATE IN CANADA’S HOUSE OF COMMONS

i. General discussion

The parliamentary business that could be taken up in a House of Commons’ parallel chamber would depend on the purpose and role members foresaw the chamber playing. This information can be obtained during the consultation process with members of the House carried out by the Committee during the 43rd Parliament in preparing the detailed plan for a provisional parallel chamber. Canada’s House is in the fortunate position of being able to benefit from the decades’ worth of experience with parallel chambers accumulated by the lower houses of the parliaments of Australia and the U.K.

One immediate lesson the Committee takes from these two other precedents is that, while Canada has adopted a Westminster model parliament and therefore has much in common with the parliaments of Australia and the U.K., the procedures, practices, traditions, and parliamentary cultures of Canada’s House have evolved and adapted over time to make them unique. As such, the function, procedures and operation of a parallel chamber for Canada’s House ought to, above all, be designed with the House’s needs in mind.

58 Natzler, 1110.

59 Natzler, 1110.

60 U.K. House of Commons Standing Order No. 24B.

In this section of the report, the Committee will set out some functional, procedural and operational design elements for parallel chambers, which may help to inform the deliberations of future members studying the establishment of a House of Commons' parallel chamber.

The Committee wishes to make clear that the following principles ought to guide the functioning, procedures and operation of a House of Commons' parallel chamber:

- Consensus and cooperation among members and political parties must be the basis for the parliamentary business taken up by the parallel chamber.
- Decisions cannot be taken in the parallel debating chamber.
- Should the House decide to establish a parallel chamber, its existence should at first be on a provisional basis.
- The rules and agenda of the parallel chamber should prioritize the needs and interests of backbench members of the House. Further, the rules and agenda of the parallel chamber should be formulated, at all times, through formal consultation with backbench members of the House.
- The government's ability to pass its agenda should not be facilitated or restrained, nor should the opposition's ability to hold a government to account be facilitated or restrained.

Lastly, the Committee is mindful that the extra time made available by establishing a parallel chamber should not increase or reduce the ratio of time currently available to the government, opposition parties, and independent members.⁶¹ Rather, the parallel chamber should be time neutral.

ii. Functional considerations

The following are a series of functional considerations about establishing a parallel chamber that the Committee heard during its study:

61 Natzler, 1140 and Stanton, 1120.

1. Who decides the business to be taken up in a parallel debating chamber?

Discussion: In Australia, bills are referred to Federation Hall following agreement and consensus between government and opposition parties. This agreement is arrived at during informal discussions that take place outside of the Chamber.

In Westminster Hall, the discretion for deciding which business gets taken up belongs to the Chairman of Ways and Means. On Mondays, the Petitions Committee is empowered to schedule debates, and on Thursdays, the business is determined by the Backbench Business Committee or the Liaison Committee, under the authority of the Chairman of Ways and Means.

2. What will the relationship be between the parallel chamber and the main Chamber?

Discussion: In the lower houses of the parliaments of Australia and the U.K., the proceedings of the parallel debating chambers operate separately, but in concert with the business of the main Chamber. Both parallel chambers have scheduling mechanisms to take on business as referred by the main Chamber and reporting mechanisms to refer business back to the main Chamber.

3. What relationship will there be, if any, between the parallel chamber and standing committees?

Discussion: In the U.K., business can be referred to Westminster Hall by any of the Petitions Committee, the Backbench Business Committee or the Liaison Committee.

4. What relationship will there be, if any, between the parallel chamber and the Senate?

Discussion: Federation Hall and Westminster Hall do not have any formal relationship with their respective upper houses.

An important practical consideration of using a House of Commons' parallel chamber to increase the number of private members' bills that are considered each Parliament is the added legislative pressure this increase would have on the Senate's work.

iii. Procedural considerations

The following are a series of procedural considerations related to establishing a parallel chamber that the Committee heard during its study:

1. What should quorum be for the parallel debating chamber?

Discussion: Quorum in both the Federation Chamber and Westminster Hall is three, including the presiding officer. In Australia, quorum also requires one government member and one opposition member. The Committee heard that a quorum of three that includes one government member and one opposition member acts as a fail-safe in Australia's parallel chamber for government and opposition parties, as either the government or the opposition can easily withdraw quorum, thereby suspending proceedings.⁶²

2. Who will serve as the presiding officer?

Discussion: The Deputy Speaker of Australia's House of Representatives presides over the proceedings of the Federation Chamber. The Second Deputy Speaker and members of the Speaker's Panel can also chair meetings of the Federation Chamber.

The Chairman of Ways and Means or a Deputy Speaker presides over sittings in the U.K.'s Westminster Hall. The Chairman of Ways and Means can also request any member from the Panel of Chairs to preside over sittings in Westminster Hall.

3. What will the sitting schedule be for the parallel debating chamber?

Discussion: The Federation Chamber and Westminster Hall are only permitted to sit when the main Chamber is sitting and operate on a fixed schedule that is about 30% to 35% of the time in the main Chamber.⁶³ The Committee also heard that a House of Commons' parallel chamber may wish to suspend during important time periods in the main Chamber, such as Oral Questions.⁶⁴

62 Surtees, 1925. Note that while Westminster Hall has a quorum of three, there is no requirement for both government and opposition parties to be represented.

63 Stanton, 1105.

64 Robert, 1115.

4. Will there be limits on the number of times a member is eligible to speak and on the length of members' speeches?

Discussion: The Committee is of the view that the procedures related to speeches in a potential House of Commons' parallel chamber should be more relaxed than in the main Chamber. For example, members wishing to take part in a debate ought to observe the practice of rising to catch the Chair's eye.

5. Will there be an official record of proceedings?

Discussion: The Committee is of the view that official transcripts ("Debates") and minutes ("Journals") should be taken of proceedings and that the proceedings should be televised and/or webcast. The Committee heard that in a recent year, eight of the 10 most-watched debates in the U.K. Parliament were on e-petitions at Westminster Hall.⁶⁵

iv. Operational considerations

The following are a series of operational considerations related to establishing a parallel chamber that the Committee heard during its study:

1. Where will the parallel chamber be located?

Discussion: The Committee heard that the Federation Chamber is about a two-minute walk from the main Chamber, while Westminster Hall is located about a three-minute walk from the main Chamber.⁶⁶

2. What will the shape be for members' seating and the layout for the parallel chamber?

Discussion: The Committee is of the view that the parallel chamber ought to have U-shaped seating for members, as is the layout in the Federation Chamber and Westminster Hall. Further, the Committee places importance on this chamber being permanently located. While the physical appearance and design of the chamber ought

65 Natzler, 1105

66 In Australia's House of Representatives, division bells ring for four minutes before the doors of the chamber are locked and the question is put by the Speaker. In the U.K. House of Commons, members have eight minutes to vote when the division bells ring before the doors to the division lobbies are locked.

to be distinguished and prestigious, due regard for overall costs, as borne by taxpayers, should also be observed.

3. How many seats would the parallel chamber have?

Discussion: The Committee heard that the Federation Chamber seats 38 members, while Westminster Hall seats about 70 members.⁶⁷

4. Will the parallel debating chamber have a name?

Discussion: The Committee is of the view that a suitable name for the new parallel debating chamber should be at the discretion of the members of House of Commons and decided by a motion adopted by the House. The name should reflect the purpose and gravity of the place.

v. Next steps

Since Confederation, the procedures and practices of the House of Commons have adapted and evolved to balance the natural tension between the amount of sitting time reserved for the consideration of government business, and time for private members' business. In its study, the Committee heard that a number of members hold the view that the House's current procedures and practices do not allow for enough meaningful opportunities for members to participate in parliamentary debate.

The Committee believes a parallel chamber, designed with members' needs in mind, could serve an important role in reducing time pressures in the main Chamber and provide additional speaking opportunities for all members. The Committee also recognizes that for any parallel chamber to succeed, members from all parties, including independents, must be provided with the opportunity to contribute both to its design and to its ongoing work, should it be established. The Committee considers this report to be a first step toward the creation of a House of Commons' parallel chamber and is confident that its recommendation that a study of parallel chambers be undertaken by the Procedure and House Affairs Committee of the 43rd Parliament will be carried out.

⁶⁷ There are 151 members of Australia's House of Representatives and 650 members of the U.K. House of Commons.

APPENDIX A: UNITED KINGDOM

House of Commons Standing Orders (2018)

10 Sittings in Westminster Hall

- (1) On days on which the House sits there shall also be a sitting in Westminster Hall—
 - (a) on Mondays beginning at 4.30pm and continuing for up to three hours, if the Petitions Committee has reported its determination that a sitting in Westminster Hall to consider one or more petitions or e-petitions should take place on that day;
 - (b) on Tuesdays and Wednesdays beginning at 9.30 am, which shall be suspended from 11.30 am till 2.30 pm and may then continue for up to a further three hours; and
 - (c) on Thursdays beginning at 1.30 pm and continuing for up to three hours.
- (2) The exceptions are as follows:
 - (a) that there will be no sittings in Westminster Hall until the House has concluded its debate on the Queen's Speech at the commencement of each Session; and
 - (b) that if the sitting occurs on a Tuesday or Wednesday which is the first day on which the House sits immediately following a periodic adjournment of the House of more than two days, the sitting shall be between 9.30 am and 2.30 pm.
- (3) When a sitting (including the time when a sitting is due to commence or resume), or any part of a sitting, in Westminster Hall coincides with a sitting of the House, the Chair shall suspend the sitting to allow Members to participate in any division called in the House or a committee of the whole House, and the time taken for any such suspensions shall be added to the duration of the sitting in Westminster Hall specified in paragraph [\(1\)](#) of this order and to any time specified by the Chairman of Ways and Means under paragraph [\(6\)](#) of this order.
- (4) Any Member of the House may take part in a sitting in Westminster Hall.

- (5) The quorum at a sitting in Westminster Hall shall be three.
- (6) The business taken at any sitting in Westminster Hall shall be such as the Chairman of Ways and Means shall appoint, and may include oral questions. The Chairman of Ways and Means may specify the finishing time of any business taken at a sitting in Westminster Hall; and the motion under consideration shall lapse at that time if not previously disposed of.
- (7) Notwithstanding paragraph (6), the business taken at any Thursday sitting in Westminster Hall shall be such as the Backbench Business Committee or the Liaison Committee shall determine; and so far as possible the time available at such sittings during a Session shall be divided as nearly as practical equally between those committees, subject to the agreement of the Chairs of those committees.
- (8) If a motion is made by a Minister of the Crown that an order of the day be proceeded with at a sitting in Westminster Hall, the question on it shall be put forthwith, but such motion may be made only with the leave of the House and may not be made on a Friday.
- (9) If any business other than a motion for adjournment or a motion to which [Standing Order No. 24B \(Amendments to motions to consider specified matters\)](#) applies is under consideration at a sitting in Westminster Hall, and not fewer than six Members rise in their places and signify their objection to further proceedings, that business shall not be further proceeded with in Westminster Hall, and the Chair shall report to the House accordingly, and any order under paragraph (8) above relating thereto shall be discharged.
- (10) The Chairman of Ways and Means or a Deputy Chairman may take the chair in Westminster Hall as Deputy Speaker; and any member of the Panel of Chairs may also take the chair at a sitting in Westminster Hall when so requested by the Chairman of Ways and Means.
- (11) If any Member persistently defies the authority of the Chair at a sitting in Westminster Hall, the Chair of that sitting may order the Member to withdraw from that sitting; and if the Member does not do so, the Chair may suspend the sitting and report the conduct of the Member to the House.
- (12) Any resolution come to at a sitting in Westminster Hall (other than a resolution to adjourn) shall be reported to the House by the Deputy Speaker and shall be a resolution of the House.

- (13) If at a sitting in Westminster Hall the opinion of the Chair as to the decision of a question (other than a question for adjournment) is challenged, that question shall not be decided, and the Chair shall report to the House accordingly; and any such question shall be put forthwith upon a motion being made in the House.
- (14) At the end of each sitting in Westminster Hall, unless a question for adjournment has previously been agreed to, the Chair shall adjourn the sitting without putting any question; and proceedings on any business which has been started but not disposed of shall lapse.
- (15) The provisions of Standing Orders No. [29 \(Powers of chair to propose question\)](#), No. [36 \(Closure of debate\)](#), No. [37 \(Majority for closure or for proposal of question\)](#), No. [38 \(Procedure on divisions\)](#), No. [39 \(Voting\)](#), No. [40 \(Division unnecessarily claimed\)](#), No. [41 \(Quorum\)](#), No. [43 \(Disorderly conduct\)](#), No. [44 \(Order in debate\)](#), No. [45 \(Members suspended, etc., to withdraw from precincts\)](#), No. [45A \(Suspension of salary of Members suspended\)](#) and No. [163 \(Motions to sit in private\)](#) shall not apply to sittings in Westminster Hall.

APPENDIX B: AUSTRALIA

House of Representatives Standing Orders (2017)

Chapter 14: Federation Chamber

General

183 Establishment of Federation Chamber

The Federation Chamber shall be established as a committee of the House to consider matters referred to it as follows:

- (a) proceedings on bills to the completion of the consideration in detail stage;
- (b) orders of the day for the resumption of debate on any motion;
- (c) subject to paragraph (a), private Members' notices and other items of private Members' and committee and delegation business referred in accordance with a Selection Committee determination pursuant to *standing order 222*;
- (d) further statements on a matter when statements have commenced in the House; and
- (e) items of government business referred from the House by a programming declaration made in accordance with *standing order 45*.

184 Membership and quorum of Federation Chamber

- (a) All Members shall be members of the Federation Chamber.
- (b) The quorum of the Federation Chamber is the Deputy Speaker, one government Member and one non-government Member.

185 Rules for House apply to Federation Chamber

The rules applying to the House also apply to the Federation Chamber, subject to the standing orders in this chapter: *see standing order 3 (application of the standing orders)*.

186 Deputy Speaker and meetings of Federation Chamber

The Federation Chamber may meet at any time during a sitting of the House, except as provided by *standing order 190 (suspensions and adjournments of the Federation Chamber)*. The Deputy Speaker must set the meeting times of the Federation Chamber, notify the times to all Members, and take the Chair when the Federation Chamber meets.

187 Maintenance of order

- (a) In the Federation Chamber the Deputy Speaker has the same responsibility for the preservation of order as the Speaker has in the House.
- (b) If disorder occurs in the Federation Chamber, the Deputy Speaker:
 - (i) may direct the Member or Members concerned to leave the room for a period of 15 minutes [*standing order 94(e) (exclusion from Chamber, etc.)* does not apply]; or
 - (ii) may, or on motion moved without notice by any Member must, suspend or adjourn the sitting. If the sitting is adjourned, any business under discussion and not disposed of at the time of the adjournment shall be set down on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.
- (c) Following a suspension or adjournment of the Federation Chamber or a refusal of a Member to leave when so directed under paragraph (b), the Deputy Speaker must report the disorder to the House.
- (d) The Deputy Speaker may report the conduct of a Member whether or not action has been taken under paragraph (b).
- (e) Any subsequent action against a Member under *standing order 94 (sanctions against disorderly conduct)* may only be taken in the House.

188 How questions decided

- (a) Every question in the Federation Chamber shall be decided on the voices and the result shall be announced by the Deputy Speaker.
- (b) If a Member dissents from the announced result, the question is unresolved. An unresolved question shall be recorded in the minutes, reported to the House and if

related to a bill or order of the day, included in a schedule attached to the Federation Chamber's report to the House.

189 Minutes recorded by Clerk of Federation Chamber

The Clerk of the Federation Chamber shall record the proceedings of the Federation Chamber as the Minutes of Proceedings of the Federation Chamber. The minutes shall form part of the Votes and Proceedings of the House for that sitting.

Suspension and adjournment of Federation Chamber

190 General rules for suspensions and adjournments of the Federation Chamber

The following general rules apply to meetings of the Federation Chamber:

- (a) The Deputy Speaker must suspend proceedings in the Federation Chamber to enable Members to attend divisions in the House.
- (b) If a quorum is not present the Deputy Speaker must immediately suspend proceedings until a stated time, or adjourn the Federation Chamber.
- (c) If the House adjourns, the Deputy Speaker must interrupt the business before the Federation Chamber and immediately adjourn the Federation Chamber.
- (d) The Federation Chamber need not adjourn between items of business, nor during a suspension of the House.
- (e) The Federation Chamber shall stand adjourned on completion of all matters referred to it, or may be adjourned on motion moved without notice by any Member—

That the Federation Chamber do now adjourn.

- (f) No amendment may be moved to the question.

191 Adjournment debate in Federation Chamber

- (a) The question ***That the Federation Chamber do now adjourn*** may be debated, but no amendment may be moved to the question.
- (b) The following qualifications apply:

Member may require question to be put

- (i) If a Member requires the question for adjournment to be put immediately it is proposed, the Deputy Speaker must put the question immediately and without debate.

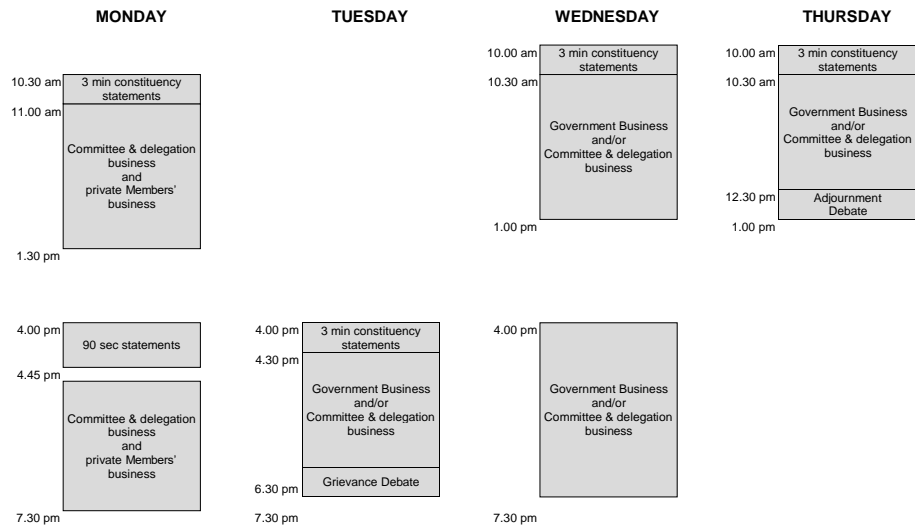
Minister may extend debate

- (ii) At the conclusion of the debate a Minister may ask for the debate to be extended by 10 minutes to enable Ministers to speak in reply to matters raised in the debate. After 10 minutes, or if debate concludes earlier, the Deputy Speaker shall immediately adjourn the Federation Chamber.

Unfinished business

- (iii) If the business being discussed is not disposed of when adjournment is proposed, the business shall be listed on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

Figure 4. Federation Chamber indicative order of business



The meeting times of the Federation Chamber are fixed by the Deputy Speaker and are subject to change. Times shown for the start and finish of items of business are approximate. Adjournment debates can occur on days other than Thursdays by agreement between the Whips.

Federation Chamber business

192 Federation Chamber's indicative order of business

The normal order of business of the Federation Chamber is set out in figure 4.

192A

192B Grievance debate

(a) The order of the day for the grievance debate stands referred to the Federation Chamber and shall be taken as the final item of business each Tuesday.

(b) After the Deputy Speaker proposes the question—

That grievances be noted—

any Member may address the Federation Chamber or move any amendment to the question. When debate is interrupted after one hour or if it concludes earlier, the Deputy Speaker shall adjourn the debate on the motion, and the resumption of the debate shall be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

193 Members' three minute constituency statements

The first item of business on any day that the Federation Chamber meets shall be constituency statements by Members. The Deputy Speaker may call a Member to make a constituency statement for no longer than three minutes. The period for Members' constituency statements may continue for 30 minutes, irrespective of suspensions for divisions in the House.

194 Adjournment of debate

If no Member is able to move adjournment of debate, the Deputy Speaker can announce the adjournment:

- (a) when there is no further debate on a matter; or
- (b) at the time set for the adjournment of the Federation Chamber.

195 Proceedings on bill where question unresolved

The Federation Chamber may continue proceedings on a bill regardless of unresolved questions unless agreement to an unresolved question is necessary to enable further

questions to be considered. If progress cannot be made, the Federation Chamber shall return the bill to the House for further consideration.

196 Resumption after suspension or adjournment

The Federation Chamber may resume proceedings at the point at which they were interrupted following any suspension or adjournment of the Federation Chamber.

197 Return of matters to the House

The Federation Chamber may return a matter to the House before its consideration is completed:

- (a) A matter may be returned to the House on a motion moved without notice at any time by a Minister—

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

The motion shall be put without amendment or debate. If the Federation Chamber agrees to, or is unable to resolve, this question, the bill or order of the day shall be returned to the House. Consideration in the House must continue from the point reached in the Federation Chamber and the House must resolve any issues that the Federation Chamber reports.

- (b) The House may at any time require a matter to be returned for further consideration, on a motion moved without notice by a Minister. The matter must be set down for consideration at a later hour that day.
- (c) An item of government business may be returned to the House by a programming declaration made in accordance with *standing order 45*.

198 Report to the House

- (a) When the Federation Chamber has fully considered a bill referred to it, a final question shall be put immediately and resolved without amendment or debate—

That this bill be reported to the House, with[out] [an] amendment[s] [and with (an) unresolved question(s)].

- (b) The Clerk of the Federation Chamber shall certify a copy of the bill or other item of business to be reported to the House, together with any schedules of amendments and unresolved questions. Unless otherwise provided, the Speaker shall report the matter at a later hour that day when other business is not before the House.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings (Meetings Nos. 144, 145, 147, 151, 154, 157, 160 and 161) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Larry Bagnell, P.C., M.P.
Chair

SUPPLEMENTARY OPINIONS OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Conservatives are supportive of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee's report calling for further consideration of a parallel chamber initiative. There are, though, some aspects we think should be emphasized.

Members' support must be established before a parallel chamber is

For any parallel debating chamber to succeed, Members of Parliament must want to establish one—and they must be willing to invest the time and energy into the work which it will require.

Conservatives believe that a critical aspect of developing any pilot project must be the briefing, consultation and engagement of our 328 colleagues who do not sit on the Procedure and House Affairs Committee.

The Committee heard some suggestions from keen observers as to the business and functions a parallel chamber could offer.

What the Committee has not yet heard, though, are the views of ordinary Members whose participation in a parallel chamber would make or break the project.

We do know that the starting point among colleagues is generally skepticism.

For example, the 2018 Samara MP survey found that 49% of MPs surveyed opposed a second debating chamber, while just 30% supported the idea.¹

We also got a glimpse of colleagues' thinking when veteran New Democratic MP Linda Duncan substituted into a Committee meeting on this study:

It's my first time at this committee. I always wondered what PROC gets up to. I have to say, I'm shaking my head at this one. I'm wondering if we can have some of the members of Samara actually follow a member of Parliament one day, and see that we don't have a second in the day to do something additional. A parallel chamber, I'm like....²

I think that the House leaders and the whips are important people to include in this discussion about what the possibilities and the implications are. I know they're challenged enough as it is making sure people show up to fill spots in committee, show up to a vote and be in the chamber to support people when they're speaking and so forth. It would probably be good to hear from them about what complications there might be for them or how we could take that into consideration.³

¹ The Samara Centre for Democracy, "The 2018 Member of Parliament Survey: Evaluating the House of Commons and options for reform", p. 14.

² Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, April 4, 2019, p. 5.

³ *Idem*, p. 8.

We also know, though, from our sibling parliaments' experiences with parallel chambers that early skepticism and concern there were overcome, mitigated and addressed. However, it's also relevant to recall that when the Australian House of Representatives and the United Kingdom House of Commons established their parallel chambers, they did so as bespoke proposals addressing commonly understood problems.⁴

It may also be relevant for the Committee to hear evidence about why, for example, the New Zealand House of Representatives declined to act upon proposals made in 2003, 2011 and 2017 for that body to create its own parallel chamber.⁵

Deputy Speaker Bruce Stanton urged us to follow the United Kingdom's process where an initial report sparked a conversation among parliamentarians, leading to later reports and eventually a pilot project;⁶ he acknowledged that "bringing parliamentarians up to speed on what it would look like" is the main goal to accomplish at this stage.⁷

The Committee's report delivers this first step and provides that opportunity for conversation.

It would, however, be a disservice to our colleagues if we leave the initiative for discussion to them.

The Official Opposition, therefore, underscores the importance of the Committee, as its very next step on this topic, investing the time and effort necessary to brief colleagues, hear out their views, and solicit their input.

Any parallel chamber proposal put forward needs to reflect this input to ensure adequate participation. If the consultation process turns up a minimum of enthusiasm for a parallel chamber, the Committee should heed that opinion and turn its energies to other studies and projects.

⁴ Australian House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Procedure, "About Time: Bills, Questions and Working Hours" (37th Parliament, First Session (October 1993)), pp. 4-5; United Kingdom House of Commons, Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, "The Parliamentary Calendar: Initial Proposals" (First Report of Session 1998-99 (HC 60)), paras. 84-89.

⁵ New Zealand House of Representatives, Standing Orders Committee, "Review of Standing Orders" (47th Parliament (December 2003)), p. 10; Clerk of the House of Representatives, "Meetings of Committee of Whole House in Second Chamber" (memorandum to members of the Standing Orders Committee, June 21, 2011); Clerk of the House of Representatives, "Review of Standing Orders: Summary and analysis of issues raised, Part One" (April 11, 2017), pp. 62, 77.

⁶ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, March 19, 2019, pp. 2, 7.

⁷ *Idem*, pp. 8-9.

A parallel chamber should not be about some things

Though Conservatives urge a consultation process among colleagues, there were some ideas already considered at the Committee which we believe represent “red lines” in any proposal for a parallel chamber.

The Committee heard that a key advantage of a parallel chamber is increased participation opportunities for backbenchers, and we believe that any further work on this project should focus on developing this aspect.

Therefore, the Official Opposition supports the relevant principles suggested by the Committee for guiding a parallel chamber, and underscores that, as a starting point on any further work, a parallel chamber must not

- facilitate the passage of a government’s legislative agenda;
- diminish or reduce opposition tools to hold governments to account;
- diminish or reduce the role backbenchers play in the main Chamber; and
- justify, directly or indirectly, any reduction in sitting days for the House.

We must proceed by consensus

Finally, Conservatives are concerned about one item which has not been clearly laid down in the Committee’s report: the need, rather than an ideal, to proceed on a consensus basis.

The merits and advantages of entering upon significant procedural reforms with consensus support speak for themselves. Indeed, they have been canvassed many times over during the present Parliament.

The Official Opposition recommends that any work by the Procedure and House Affairs Committee toward a parallel chamber, including the development of a pilot project, must proceed on a consensus basis.

