

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
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Yellowknife, N. W. T.
May 7, 1981

Mr. B. A. McLaughlin, MLA
Box 555
PINE POINT, N.W.T.

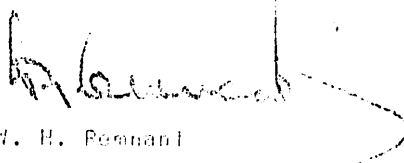
Dear Mr. McLaughlin;

On the final day of the Fall Session of the Assembly in Frobisher Bay, a motion which you introduced was adopted calling upon the Members Services Board to look into the question of opening Standing and Special Committee meetings to the general public and to report back to the Assembly.

The Members Services Board considered this question at meetings held during the Winter Session and finalized its conclusions when it met on April 14. In summary, the Board has concluded that Standing and Special Committee meetings should not be opened up to the general public. The reasons for this conclusion and certain measures to better inform the public of the activities of Standing and Special Committees and to establish better communications between Committees and the general public are set out in the attached statement approved by the Board.

You may wish to table the attached statement during the forthcoming session at Hay River for the information of other Members.

Yours sincerely,



W. H. Bennett

February, 1981.

CONCERNING THE OPENING OF STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

At Frobisher Bay the Legislative Assembly adopted a motion calling upon the Members Services Board to investigate the possibility of opening Standing and Special Committee meetings to the general public.

The Members Services Board has considered this matter and has concluded that the present practice whereby such meetings are not open to the general public should be continued.

In reaching this decision the Members Services Board identified a number of serious implications that would probably result from open Committee meetings. The most significant of these are:-

- 1) The Executive, senior departmental officials and officials of native organizations could not be expected to provide to open meetings the same confidential information that they are now prepared to provide to closed meetings of committees.
- 2) It is unlikely that the administration would be prepared to refer legislation and estimates to open committee meetings prior to their introduction into the Assembly as is now done. It is not unreasonable, the Board felt, to expect that if committee meetings were made open to the public legislation and estimates would then not likely be referred to committees until after introduction into the Assembly.
- 3) To ensure the provision of an accurate record of committee meetings verbatim recording would be essential. Without it the record of the proceedings of a committee could be subject to challenge by the public, committee members, the Media, etc...
- 4) A number of consequential results could also occur including:-
 - a) a general slowing down of the legislative process resulting from consideration of estimates and legislation by committees after the commencement of a session;
 - b) increased operating costs because of the need to employ additional staff to produce a verbatim record, to provide public address and interpretation systems at all committee meetings, etc...

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While deciding that the present procedures should be retained, the Members Services Board concluded that certain steps could be taken by individual committees to ensure greater public awareness of committee activities by:-

- a) distributing more widely throughout the Territories committee reports tabled in the Assembly; and
- b) inviting specific groups or individuals to appear before committees on matters likely to be of particular interest to them.

The Board also wished to remind MLAs that in accordance with the Rules of the Assembly MLAs who are not members of a particular committee may attend meetings of that Committee.

In conclusion the Board agreed that Committee Chairmen should maintain good press relations keeping the media generally informed of Committee activities.

But the Board stressed that while doing so chairmen must recognize that the privileges of the Assembly entitle it to receive all committee reports or extracts thereof prior to any public release.

The Board also recommended that Committee Chairmen personally attend to media relations or assign this responsibility to a specific committee member.