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An Opportunity for Change in the Functioning of Legislatures
Examining the Policy Field Committee System in Saskatchewan

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The 1990s brought a recognition of a disturbing phenomena dubbed by Political Scientists as the democratic deficit. Academics and politicians alike began to speak of the lack of democracy often found in the decision-making processes of government. Many were alarmed about the significant amount of power exercised by senior government officials and the executive level of government. The general mood of the public indicated that Canada was, at many different levels of government, experiencing a democratic deficit. Both provincially and federally, fewer Canadians voted in elections. In the 2004 federal election, only 22% of first time eligible voters participated in the democratic process.¹ Ironically, more people voted for the winner of *Canadian Idol*, than for the leader of the country.² Citizens also had trouble identifying those that were in contention to be the Prime Minister. Only 30% of eligible voters could identify the Leader of the Opposition.³ Clearly, citizens were detached from the political process and were not utilised in the creation of public policy. Governments and academics began to examine how the public could be re-engaged in democracy.

In Saskatchewan, Members of the Legislative Assembly have responded to the lack of citizen engagement in political processes. Members of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures proposed reforms that would encompass a series of changes to the structure of the legislative committee system that was formerly in place. Although the committee made recommendations such as the use of laptops and the allowance of certain beverages in the Chamber, and the restructuring of the Private Members' day, the most significant contribution remains the restructuring of the legislative committees. The

¹ Caroline Di Cocco, David McLaughlin, and David Hume, "Democratic Renewal: Solutions in Search of Problem," in *Policy, Politics & Governance*, 8 (December 2004): 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

purpose of this paper is to examine the policy field committee system that has been adopted by the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. This paper will describe the theoretical basis behind parliamentary committees, illustrate the movement for change to Saskatchewan's committee system, examine the implementation of changes to the system, and evaluate how the committee system has changed the process of governance.

Theoretical Basis of Parliamentary Committees

Regardless of governance style, most parliamentary committee systems are based on a similar theoretical basis. The primary purpose of committees is usually to provide a scrutiny function.⁴ Through the scrutiny of bills, regulations, and estimates, committees work to hold governments accountable for various policies and actions.⁵ The powerful committee system found in America does not accurately represent committees found in most countries.⁶ Though committees do play a scrutiny function in most Parliaments outside of the United States, most have much more limited power and resources, and usually garner less media attention, than their American counterparts. It has only been in recent years that a large number of committee systems have mimicked the American system, with committees playing a more substantial role in investigation.

As Parliaments continue to change with the processes of governance, the way committees are used to scrutinize governments has also changed. An increased number of Chambers have recognized the important role a committee system can play in

⁴ Lawrence D. Longley and Roger H. Davidson, "Introduction: Changing Perspectives in Changing Institutions," in The New Role of Parliamentary Committees, eds. Lawrence D. Longley and Roger H. Davison (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 1. See also: Barnhart, Gordon. Parliamentary Committees: Enhancing Democratic Governance: A Report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Study Group on Parliamentary Committees and Committee Systems, (London: Cavendish Publishing, 1999), 41.

⁵ Art Donahue, "Forward," in Parliamentary Committees: Enhancing Democratic Governance: A Report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Study Group on Parliamentary Committees and Committee Systems, (London: Cavendish Publishing, 1999), v.

⁶ Barnhart, 3.

investigating political issues and examining public policy to hold the executive more accountable.⁷ Committees are now commonly perceived as enhancing the legislative process through careful consideration and examination of policy, rather than acting as a barrier to an efficient public service or government.⁸ Parliaments are also recognizing the significant value committees can provide in disseminating information to Members. Members that participate in committees receive information that may not be readily available to all Members in the normal business of the Chamber.⁹ Committees often focus on issues that Chambers could not provide the necessary time or proper environment to investigate.¹⁰ Parliaments have also recognized the important role that the public can play in creating policy and realize that committees often create an environment where Members can easily interact and receive information from the public to increase public input into the legislative process.¹¹ Clearly, it is recognized that if “a legislature expects to play a significant role in policy-making it must have a highly developed committee system generating policy expertise.”¹²

The Movement for Change to Saskatchewan’s Committee System

In 1906 the first committee was established in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.¹³ Before the committee system was reformed in 2000, committees possessed

⁷ Donahue, v.

⁸ Barnhart, 3.

⁹ Kate Burton, Community Participation in Parliamentary Communities: Opportunities and Barriers (1998): 28 pages. Online. Retrieved from Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library. <<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/1999-2000/2000rp10.htm>> (Retrieved 15 February 2005).

¹⁰ Donahue, v.

¹¹ Burton.

¹² Malcolm Shaw, “Parliamentary Studies: A Global Perspective,” in The New Roles of Parliamentary Committees. Eds. Lawrence D. Longley and Roger H. Davidson, (London: Frank Cass, 1998): 229.

¹³ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, History of Committees (2005): 7 pages. Online. Retrieved from Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly website. <<http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/committees/Main%20and%20Common%20Pages/General%20Outline%20of%20Committees.htm#Introduction>> (Retrieved 15 February 2005).

no authority except what had been delegated by the Legislative Assembly. At this time the Legislative Assembly had four types of committees including: Committees of the Whole House, Standing Committees, Select Committees and Special Committees. Normally there were two committees of the Whole House, including Committee of the Whole and the Committee of Finance. The Committee of the Whole would look at all bills, both public and private, after second reading or when the bill was reported back by a Standing Committee. In Committee of the Whole bills were considered for clause by clause consideration. The Committee of Finance would examine all estimates for all government departments and agencies.

There were also thirteen standing committees that would undertake work outlined in the Rules or as referred to them by the Legislative Assembly. Most standing committees would meet sporadically, based on their mandate. The Legislative Assembly also operated special committees. Special committees were appointed by the Legislative Assembly to investigate specific areas. These committees often held public hearings and were dissolved once they submitted their final report. The most active committees found in the Saskatchewan Legislature were the three scrutiny committees: Public Accounts, Crown Corporations and Regulations.¹⁴

Traditionally, the committee system in Saskatchewan played quite a limited role. On paper, the committee system had the necessary operational powers to function in an effective manner, but in reality, the system accomplished little.¹⁵ Many of the

¹⁴ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Committees of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan (2004): 8 pages. Online. Retrieved from Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly website. <http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/committees/Archive/comminfo.htm> (Retrieved 25 July 2005).

¹⁵ Dan D'Autremont, "Interview," May 31, 2005.

committees were underutilized and were not required to meet.¹⁶ Members did appreciate the work of specific special committees, which would investigate certain policy issues based on a mandate provided by the Legislature, such as the Special Committee on Tobacco Control.¹⁷ Members often valued the public input these special committees provided through public hearings, as it allowed Members to understand how the public felt on important issues.¹⁸ These committees also demonstrated that on important issues, members of committees could work together to create legislation and foster meaningful changes in society. The problem was that the committee system rarely afforded Members the opportunity to work in such a collegial environment. Instead, Members were often trapped in larger scrutiny committees, where the environment was much more competitive and controversial.

In Canada, much of the institutional changes that had taken place in Parliaments were brought on by the belief in the democratic deficit. Many Chambers felt reform was necessary because of the growing sentiment that there was a democratic deficit in Canada whereby too much power “had become concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and senior Members of the Public Service.”¹⁹ Though criticism of the democratic deficit often focused on the federal government, it was easy for provinces to see these problems reflected in provincial Legislatures. Much of the efforts to mitigate the democratic deficit have focused on electoral reform, enhancing the role of elected officials, and increasing citizen participation in governance.²⁰ In British Columbia, the

¹⁶ Andrew Thomson, Myron Kowalsky, and Deb Higgins, 11.

¹⁷ Greg Putz, “Interview,” May 2, 2005.

¹⁸ Greg Putz, “Discussion on the Democratic Deficit in Saskatchewan,” (paper presented to Political Studies class, March 7, 2002), 1.

¹⁹ Putz, “Discussion on the Democratic Deficit”, 1.

²⁰ Di Cocco, McLaughlin, and Hume, 1.

Legislative Assembly established the Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform. Ontario's Democratic Renewal Secretariat has examined ways to enhance the role of Members.²¹ In Saskatchewan, changes to the committee system provided Members an opportunity to mitigate the democratic deficit by enhancing the role of elected officials and increasing citizen participation in governance.

The public perception of Private Members may also have contributed to catalyzing changes to the committee system. Private Members expressed concern over the public perception that as Members they did not contribute to the governance process. In reality, the public could not see the valuable contributions Private Members made because much of this work happened behind closed doors.²² Changes to Saskatchewan's committee system would also allow Members of the Opposition to participate more meaningfully and visibly in the public policy process. Because of the strained environment in the Legislative Assembly, Private Members' day largely consisted of Members either "commending or condemning the government."²³ Another major factor that may have contributed to changes to the committee system was the close numbers between the parties in the house. For the government to maintain the support from its own Members, the executive had to be willing to explore ideas surrounding changes to the committee system that were largely put forward by Private Members of the Government.²⁴

The Special Committee on Rules and Procedures first met in April of 2000 to examine proposals from both the New Democratic Party (NDP) and Saskatchewan Party

²¹ Di Cocco, McLaughlin, and Hume, 2.

²² Putz, "Discussion on the Democratic Deficit", 1.

²³ Putz, "Discussion on the Democratic Deficit", 1.

²⁴ Putz, "Interview".

(Sask Party) caucuses to examine proposed reforms to the rules and procedures in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.²⁵ The reports put forward by the NDP and Sask Party focused primarily on changes to the committee system, Private Members' day, and the structure and administration of the Legislative Assembly.²⁶ Reforms that focused on changes to the committee system were largely advocated in a report submitted by Private Members of the NDP, who included Andrew Thomson, Myron Kowalsky, and Deb Higgins.²⁷ In the report, the authors argue that their proposed reforms "provide for greater public input, streamline the legislative process, and modernize [the] assembly."²⁸

In order to further explore changes to the committee structure, the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures created a study delegation to visit Chambers with committee systems similar to the one Saskatchewan hoped to adopt. Members of the study delegation included Myron Kowalsky, Andrew Thomson, and Dan D'Autremont and the delegation was assisted by the Deputy Clerk, Greg Putz.²⁹ They viewed different committee systems based on the policy field model in the Parliaments of New Zealand and Australia.³⁰ Under the policy field model, committees examine certain public policy areas, and the executive departments that correspond with these subjects.³¹

Members of Parliament in Australia and New Zealand firmly believed in the value of their committee systems. These Members stressed that the committees added to the

²⁵ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, First Report, First Session of the 24th Legislature, April 27, 2000, 1.

²⁶ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, Second Session of the 24th Legislature, July 4, 2001, 1.

²⁷ At the time of the writing of the NDP position paper, Higgins, Kowalsky, and Thomson were all Private Members. Shortly after the First Report of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Myron Kowalsky became Speaker of the House. Deb Higgins is now Minister of Labour and Andrew Thomson is Minister of Learning.

²⁸ Thomson, Kowalsky, and Higgins, 1.

²⁹ At this time, Myron Kowalsky was Speaker of the House, Dan D'Autremont was a Private Member for the Sask Party and Andrew Thomson was a Private Member for the NDP.

public policy process and led to major benefits for Members.³² Members that participated in the committee system felt it allowed them to gain the necessary training to move on and serve in Cabinet or make a career and reputation simply by serving on a committee.³³ There was often competition to serve on the committees because Members wanted to complete meaningful work in their areas of interest.³⁴ Even Cabinet Ministers felt that the committee structure benefited the governing process, because it allowed them to understand what issues were important to the public.³⁵ The committee structure provided another venue to access the public which could reinforce information that Cabinet Ministers already received. Yet, members of committees still felt that they were able to better balance the power of the executive,³⁶ which could aid in mitigating the democratic deficit.

Because of the significant benefits the policy field committee system could offer to Members, the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures pushed that the new system be adopted. A changed committee system would enhance the role of all Members of the Legislative Assembly through increased participation in the legislative process.³⁷ Members that served on a committee would also cultivate a specific expertise in certain policy areas, allowing Members to be more informed when making decisions.³⁸ It was believed that through the work of committees, a more collegial work environment for Members could also be created. By focusing on a specific issue Members could work

³⁰ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 1.

³¹ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 2.

³² Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 3.

³³ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 3.

³⁴ Putz, "Interview".

³⁵ Putz, "Interview".

³⁶ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 3.

³⁷ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 12.

³⁸ Andrew Thomson, "Interview," May 30, 2005.

together to create meaningful change in a more cooperative work environment. Partisan politics may be reduced because of the important issues Members were working on together. As members worked together on important topic areas, more cooperation could be fostered between caucuses, as well as Members, for their work to be effective.³⁹

The policy field committee system would also allow for greater public input into the policy making process. When legislation is currently created in Saskatchewan, the government consults stakeholders. The committees would allow for input not only from stakeholders, but from all members of the public through meetings and inquiries, allowing for a more inclusive policy process.⁴⁰ Increased consultation with the public would also increase awareness among the public on policy issues, as well as highlight what Members of the Legislative Assembly were working on.⁴¹ By providing the public with views of how the parties actually worked together, it was felt that the negative image of politicians often portrayed by the media could be mitigated.⁴² Changes to the committee system thus meant that a greater balance between the power of all Members could be found in the Chamber, while increasing citizen participation and government accountability, which are all important factors that could aid in mitigating the democratic deficit.

Explanation of Saskatchewan's Policy Field Committee System

Under the policy field committee system that was adopted in 2003, there are four policy field committees. These include the Standing Committee on the Economy, the Standing Committee on Human Services, the Standing Committee on Crown and Central

³⁹ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 12.

⁴⁰ Thomson, Kowalsky, and Higgins, 7.

⁴¹ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 12.

Agencies and the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure. There continue to be three House Committees including the Standing Committee on House Services, the Standing Committee on Privileges and the Standing Committee on Private Bills. The Public Accounts Committee continues to function as it did before committee changes, and examines reports from the Provincial Auditor in an effort to increase government accountability.⁴³ The four committees examine estimates, bills, regulations, annual reports, and can conduct inquiries. Committees are formatted so that work must be completed in the above order to ensure house business is completed in an efficient manner and work is completed in tandem with the Legislative Assembly's timetable⁴⁴. One of the major differences from the previous committee system is that bills can be referred to committees after first or second reading. Bills that are referred to committee after first reading are for the purpose of a hearing⁴⁵. Because the bill has not yet been passed in principle, the referral of bills after first reading may allow for more discussion and consideration of certain legislation⁴⁶. All bills, even if a bill is sent to committee after first reading, are referred to one of the four policy field committees after second reading. Here, a bill is given clause by clause consideration as it has already been approved in principle by the legislature⁴⁷.

Arguably, the power of the policy field committee system is found in the discretion that committees have to examine regulations and conduct inquiries. Traditionally, committees would examine whether or not regulations were "ultra vires" or

⁴² Kowalsky, "Interview," and Higgins, "Interview," and D'Autremont, "Interview," and Thomson, "Interview".

⁴³ Draude and Hamilton, 82.

⁴⁴ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 9.

⁴⁵ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 8.

⁴⁶ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 9.

⁴⁷ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 8.

beyond the scope of the government to implement. Under the new committee system, committees can examine regulations that Members feel are detrimental to the interest of the public, allowing committees to examine how public policy is created and ensure that policy is in the interest of Saskatchewan residents.⁴⁸ The policy field committees also have the power to conduct inquiries. Previously committees could investigate areas that were mandated to them by the House. Under the policy field committee system, inquiries can be initiated in a policy area through a number of ways, including the referral of a topic by a Minister to a committee, as well as the referral of a subject to a committee by the House.⁴⁹ A substantial ability that committees now have is to initiate inquiries through the agreement of the majority of its members. This allows committees to conduct meaningful work based in areas that are important to the members of that committee.⁵⁰

Implementation of Change to Saskatchewan's Committee System

The Special Committee on Rules and Procedures faced a significant number of challenges to have the Legislative Assembly adopt the policy field committee system. The changes to the committee system were originally largely supported by the government, and more specifically, the authors of the NDP position paper that outlined the proposed changes. These Members included Andrew Thomson, Myron Kowalsky and Deb Higgins. Certain Members expressed opposition to the committee system from both the Sask Party and the NDP because it presented further challenges to getting work done efficiently and represented changes to the traditional structure of the Legislative

⁴⁸ Putz, "Interview".

⁴⁹ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 9.

⁵⁰ Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Second Report, 9.

Assembly.⁵¹ Members of the Cabinet also expressed concern with the committee system because it may impact the profile of Ministers or increase their challenges to what they are working on because they are required to appear before committees.⁵²

Though there had been challenges in getting agreement to the policy field committee system, significant difficulties for the system remain. Once the Legislative Assembly agreed to the structure of the committee system, there was still the issue of funding. In 2002, the Deputy Clerk presented the Board of Internal Economy with various options for funding the committee structure. In order for the committees to be completely operational, funding is required for television broadcasting for both committee rooms; two public hearings for two of the four policy committees per year; staffing to serve the four committees.⁵³ The cost of fully funding the committee system was \$710 000/year and it was predicted that much of these costs would be offset by savings from the operational costs of operating the Chamber itself.⁵⁴ The Board of Internal Economy originally denied funding the committee structure in 2002 citing the current difficulties that the province faced financially.⁵⁵

After the Third Report of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, the Board of Internal Economy approved some spending for the committee system and the renovations of the committee room in the basement of the Legislative Assembly on January 5, 2004.⁵⁶ The Board of Internal Economy has still not agreed to fund the second

⁵¹ Putz, "Interview," and Deb Higgins, "Interview," May 25, 2005.

⁵² Higgins, "Interview" and Kowalsky, "Interview".

⁵³ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Board of Internal Economy, Minutes and Verbatim, February 21, 2002, 54.

⁵⁴ Board of Internal Economy, Minutes and Verbatim, February 21, 2002, 54.

⁵⁵ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Third Report, Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature: April 2, 2003, 2.

⁵⁶ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Board of Internal Economy, Minutes and Verbatim, January 5, 2004.

committee room.⁵⁷ Though funding proposals for the committee system have appeared before the Board of Internal Economy since 2002, the system is still not funded to conduct any inquiries or have any extra support or research staff. In 2005, the Deputy Clerk again presented various funding options for the committee system before the Board of Internal Economy. During the request, the Deputy Clerk stated that the Chairs and the Deputy Chairs of committees had expressed an interest in conducting inquiries and wanted to budget for one inquiry being conducted in the upcoming year.⁵⁸ Again, the Board of Internal Economy failed to recognize and fully fund what the Deputy Clerk called “the most profound procedural and operational transformation [of the Legislative Assembly] since the beginning of the province in 1905.”⁵⁹

Evaluating the Success of the Committee System

Arguably, the success of the committee system is linked to its ability to function correctly, where committees are examining bills, regulations, annual reports, legislation, and conducting inquiries. Because Members of the Board of Internal Economy have not agreed to fully fund the system, its success has been limited. In order to evaluate the success of the committee system, this section will look at the changes to the roles of Members and public servants. Next, it will look at how Members evaluate the success of the committee system. The section then examines why changes were stalled. Finally, it will outline how successful the committee system has been in meeting the original objectives that were proposed by Members of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures and if any of the changes have worked to reduce the democratic deficit.

⁵⁷ Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, Board of Internal Economy, Minutes and Verbatim, February 10, 2005, 44.

⁵⁸ Board of Internal Economy, Minutes and Verbatim, February 10, 2005, 10.

⁵⁹ Greg Putz speaking at the Board of Internal Economy, Minutes and Verbatim, February 21, 2002, 53.

The policy field committee system has the opportunity to make valuable changes to the roles of Members, but because the system has not been completely adopted, changes have been limited. Members interviewed for this paper did not list any meaningful changes they felt had happened to the role of individual Members. Kowalsky ascertained that the committee system has changed the role of the opposition, whereby the opposition have a greater opportunity to test their ideas and can work in a more productive environment.⁶⁰ D'Autremont argued that the new committee system has not changed their role, but instead has changed how this role is performed, because the committee system still allows the opposition to hold the government accountable, but may now do so in a more collegial fashion.⁶¹ Cabinet Ministers also mentioned ways in which the committee system has altered their role. Questions that are put before Ministers may be more specific, but Ministers also have the ability to have public servants answer more technical questions.⁶² The new committee system may also have impacted the relationship between Ministers and public servants as a delicate balance must be maintained whereby Ministers must ensure they are answering the political questions and officials answer the technical ones.⁶³ Thomson argues that the policy field committee system holds public servants more accountable for their work since they have a certain degree of accountability to the Legislative Assembly.⁶⁴ While it is important for public servants to be accountable to government, committees must continue to strive to hold the executive level of government accountable, as public servants are usually held accountable through various other measures.

⁶⁰ Kowalsky, "Interview".

⁶¹ D'Autremont, "Interview".

⁶² Higgins, "Interview".

⁶³ Higgins, "Interview".

Public servants felt that the policy field committee system had impacted their role in other ways. Many of those contacted felt that the new system offered public servants the opportunity to answer technical questions and can also explain programs in a way that benefits the knowledge and understanding of both Government and Opposition Members.⁶⁵ Clearly, it can be a great benefit for Members to have more interaction with public servants, as it increases their knowledge in how government programs function and work. Public servants did not feel it had changed the role between Ministers and public servants, or that they were held any more accountable than they already were through various other measures. There was a definite awareness of the need to safeguard public servants from having to answer political questions and that questions directed at public servants focus on technical issues, in order to separate politics from administration.

Members seemed to have mixed reactions as to the success of the committee system. Kowalsky points out that the committees are making a difference, as Members ask more substantial questions and there has been a reduction in political rhetoric.⁶⁶ As Members that are assigned to committees can continue with their membership for several years they may become more knowledgeable and familiar with the new structure and the policy issues/departments assigned to the committee. At this time, they may be more willing to take control of committees, allowing the committees to evolve into other areas,

⁶⁴ Thomson, "Interview" and Kowalsky, "Interview".

⁶⁵ Melanie Baldwin, "RE: Questions on the Committee System and the Role of Public Servants," *E-mail to Rhiannon Stromberg*, (Retrieved 8 June 2005). And Louise Greenberg, "RE: Questions on the Committee System and the Role of Public Servants," *E-mail to Rhiannon Stromberg*, (Retrieved 20 June 2005), and Jim Nicol, "Re: Questions on the Committee System and the Role of Public Servants," *E-mail to Rhiannon Stromberg*, (Retrieved 30 June 2005) and Lily Stonehouse, "RE: Questions on the Committee System and the Role of Public Servants," *Letter to Rhiannon Stromberg*, (Retrieved 20 June 2005).

⁶⁶ Kowalsky, "Interview".

such as public inquiries.⁶⁷ Kowalsky concludes that until Members are more acquainted with the system, further reforms, or even the full implementation of the committee structure will not be possible. Instead, Members may see the committee system slowly evolving over the next five to ten years.⁶⁸

The primary benefit that Members received from the committee system is that it allows Members to be more productive and efficient with their own time. Before changes to the committee system, Members would spend a large amount of time in the Legislative Assembly for Committee of the Whole. Because the committee system requires Members to only attend the committees that they serve on, Members have substantially more time available for work outside of the Chamber.⁶⁹ Committees also allow Members to be more specific with their line of questioning since senior public servants from the department are available to answer questions. Higgins states that though the committee system is not completely functioning, it has allowed for a more positive relationship to develop between Members, as it allows them to get out of the very adversarial environment of the House.⁷⁰ D'Autremont believes that a more collegial environment in the committees may be better established if the numbers in the Legislative Assembly were not so close.⁷¹

Members seem to understand the need for further changes to the committee system to take place. Thomson explained that certain concessions that were made during the negotiations of the committee system must be changed. Particularly, he makes a valuable argument that all estimates should be sent to the policy field committees, instead

⁶⁷ Kowalsky, "Interview".

⁶⁸ Kowalsky, "Interview".

⁶⁹ Higgins, "Interview," and Thompson, "Interview," and D'Autremont, "Interview".

⁷⁰ Higgins, "Interview".

of the opposition being allowed to hold certain estimates in the Committee of Finance.⁷² The fact that Members could not agree on how public inquiries should be conducted was another factor that Members have still not reached agreement on.⁷³

Further resources needed for the functioning of the committee system may be stalled by the current practices being used by Members in committees. The policy field committee system was designed for Members to participate in the committee they were assigned to. Because Opposition Members have frequently substituted different Members into committees, Members are not gaining any expertise in their specific subject areas.⁷⁴ Without this expertise, Members may not be able to play a more significant role in policy development. The constant substitution of Members may also detract from fostering any sense of collegiality

D'Autremont argues that the substitution of different Members onto the policy field committees is currently necessary because there is such a large opposition caucus. It is through member substitution that more Members have the opportunity to participate in the policy process in a meaningful manner.⁷⁵ An argument can also be made that Members of the Opposition do not have sufficient access to resources to properly prepare for all areas that a policy field committee covers. For Members to conduct meaningful work on committees, funding must be provided for an adequate research staff.

There has also been disagreement between the parties over the ability of Government Members to ask questions during committee meetings.⁷⁶ The Opposition

⁷¹ D'Autremont, "Interview".

⁷² Thomson, "Interview".

⁷³ Thomson, "Interview".

⁷⁴ Thomson, "Interview".

⁷⁵ D'Autremont, "Interview".

⁷⁶ Thomson, "Interview".

argues that Government Members must be willing to use the committees to ask meaningful questions concerning what the committee is investigating, rather than just using the opportunity to support the government's policy.⁷⁷ By providing the committees with a non-partisan research staff, all members of the committee, including Government Members, may feel more comfortable asking questions. Independent researchers allow all Members the ability to ask questions in a more meaningful manner. With public servants also providing answers to technical questions, all members of a committee may feel more comfortable asking questions based on expertise rather than political rhetoric.

The Overall Success of Saskatchewan's Committee System

The success of the committee system in meeting the original objectives posed by Members of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures can be described as mixed, at best. The current committee structure may not be serving to enhance the knowledge of Members or increase the participation of Members. Since fewer Members are required to be present in the committees to maintain quorum than is required in the Chamber, fewer Members are participating in the legislative process. Members may not be actually gaining any significant expertise because of their limited participation in the legislative process. Even with an increase in the substitution of Members to participate on committees, all Members are given a very limited opportunity to partake. The frequent substitution does not foster expertise among Members, or allow for a more collegial work environment to be created. Because the committee system is currently not funded to conduct public inquiries, more public input into the policy process has also not been accomplished.

⁷⁷ D'Autremont, "Interview".

It is because of the lack of support that the committee system currently receives, that it has been unable to meet the original objectives that were proposed by Members. The problems that warranted changes to the committee system still exist. Yet, there has been a lack of momentum to adopt the necessary changes to the committee system to adequately deal with these concerns. Though it is possible that the committee system could evolve over the next decade into a system that functions properly, an argument can also be made that without momentum to implement the changes, the committee system could remain stagnant.

Overall, the policy field committee system could serve to not only reinforce the accepted theory and principles on the role of legislative committees, but also strengthen them. Other policy field committees strengthen the ability of Parliaments to hold the executive branch of government accountable through increased participation in the policy process and further scrutiny of policy areas. Because the policy field committee system is not properly funded, Members do not have the opportunity to be more informed on policy areas or have more public input into the policy process. Without this further input, Members are still working with limited resources in which to hold an increasingly complex government system accountable. The new committee structure has thus not increased the effectiveness or the responsible nature of the Legislative Assembly. It has left Members with limited resources in which to combat the democratic deficit in Saskatchewan.

Arguably, the one major area that the committee system has succeeded in is its efficiency for Members to get through the work of the Legislative Assembly. To a large extent though, the committees are currently completing the work that would normally

have been conducted in the Chamber.⁷⁸ Yet, rather than focusing on getting more committee work done with the extra time the committee system provides, committees continue to function much the same as they did under the old committee system.

The ability of the changed committee system to address the democratic deficit in Saskatchewan has been minimal. Members may have the opportunity to work in an environment that is somewhat more cooperative, yet it was difficult to get a consensus on what this cooperation has led to. Arguably, the executive government continues to exercise a great deal of power in Saskatchewan, which is well illustrated by the underfunding of the committee system. There has been no notable shift in the balance of power of Members, and there has been no increase in the avenues for ordinary citizens to become involved in governance. Though the public may have more of an opportunity to view committee meetings, they still can not participate in them. It is possible that the failed committee system could contribute to strengthening the democratic deficit in Saskatchewan rather than weakening it.

Conclusion

The adoption of the policy field committee system was a significant undertaking by Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. A substantial amount of work went into the investigation of committee systems in Parliaments around the world. Further work was done in the drafting of rules and procedures of the committee system to ensure that the model would work in Saskatchewan. Members of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures were willing to go to these great lengths because they believed in the value of what a new committee system could bring to the governing process. The committee system could increase the recognition of Private Members, help cultivate a

⁷⁸ Putz, "Interview".

more meaningful role for Private Members, increase input of the public into the policy process and create a more collegial work environment for all Members. The new committee system could also serve to reinforce the scrutiny function of committees by strengthening the role of committees, particularly through public inquiries, to hold the executive accountable. It was felt that this would contribute to more transparent governing processes and better governing practices that would aid in mitigating the democratic deficit in Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately, the committee system has had limited success in accomplishing any of the above goals because it has not been properly funded. Without the ability to conduct inquiries or have research staff, the committees have been seriously hampered in their ability to impact the governing process. The lack of funding has also stalled the momentum that originally fuelled the changes to Saskatchewan's committee system. It is possible that as Members become more comfortable with the committee system, this momentum may be found and a further adaptation of the original committee changes that were proposed could take place. Yet, a stronger argument is that changes to the committees could remain stagnant unless Members recognize the valuable resource that they have at their disposal. Without a properly functioning committee system, Members are limiting their ability to contribute to a more transparent government system and effective public policy that could mitigate the democratic deficit in Saskatchewan. It is time for the Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly to re-examine the adopted committee system and make the necessary changes to allow it to function properly.

Appendix A: Explanation of Major Changes to Legislative Committee System

	Previous Committee System	New Policy Field Committee System
Committees of the Whole House:	<p>Committee of the Whole – used to examine all legislation, except that legislation that was considered not important or non-controversial</p> <p>Committee of Finance – used to examine all estimates for departments and agencies</p>	<p>Committee of the Whole – reviews bills after they have been examined by one of the policy field committees</p> <p>Committee of Finance – used to examine certain estimates as negotiated by the House Leaders</p>
Standing Committees:	<p>Agriculture – est. in 1906, last met in 2002 (# of meetings varies)</p> <p>Communication – est. in 1986, last met in 2002 (2-3 meetings/year)</p> <p>Constitutional Affairs – est. in 1992, last met in 1992</p> <p>Crown Corporations – est. in 1946, last met in 2002</p> <p>Education – est. in 1906, last met in 1923</p> <p>Environment – est. in 1992</p> <p>Estimates – reviews estimates sent by unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly (LA), usually included those for the LA and officers of the LA, est. in 1981, last met in 2002 (2 – 3 meetings/year)</p> <p>Health Care – est. in 2001, last met in 2001</p> <p>Municipal Law – est. in 1906, last met in 1992</p> <p>Non-controversial Bills – est. in 1970, last met in 1997</p> <p>Private Member’s Bills – est. in 1906, last met in</p>	<p>Human Services – covers areas in health, social services, education, culture, justice, and areas concerning the right of individual citizens</p> <p>Economy – covers areas of finance, economic development, co-operatives, labour, agriculture, environment, natural resources, rural issues, and capital funds</p> <p>Crown and Central Agencies – covers areas of Crown Investments Corp and its subsidiaries, supply and services, central agencies, liquor, gaming, and all other revenue related agencies</p> <p>Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure – covers areas of transportation, and municipal, intergovernmental, inter-provincial, aboriginal, and northern affairs</p> <p>Privileges</p> <p>Private Bills</p>

	<p>2002 (3 – 4 meetings/year)</p> <p>Privileges and Elections – est. in 1906, last met in 1978</p> <p>Public Accounts – scrutinizes past year’s expenditures through a detailed review and the Provincial Auditor’s report, est. in 1906, last met in 2002 (15 – 20 meetings/year)</p>	<p>House Services</p> <p>Public Accounts</p>
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Comparison of Delegated Work to Legislative Committees

	Previous System	Policy Field System
Estimates	Committee of Finance, few estimates were sent to the Standing Committee on Estimates	Policy Field Committees, some estimates are still held in the Committee of Finance (as determined by House Leaders)
Regulations	Special Committee on Regulations	Policy Field Committees
Bills	Committee of the Whole	Policy Field Committees
Annual Reports	Standing Committee on Crown Corporations	Policy Field Committees
Inquiries	Special Committees were usually established (i.e. Special Committee on Tobacco Control)	Policy Field Committees
Scrutiny of Expenditures	Public Accounts	Public Accounts

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