

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2871

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to the legislative process.

Brief Description: Establishing a question period with the house of representatives for elected officials and agency directors.

Sponsors: Representatives R. Meyers, Ballard, Kremen, Moak, Roland, Chappell, Jones, Rayburn, Dorn, Sheldon, L. Johnson, Eide, Campbell, Finkbeiner, Conway, Springer, Karahalios, Johanson, Ogden, Patterson, Kessler, Orr, Basich and Anderson; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 2, 1994, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; L. Thomas, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King and Pruitt.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: In a parliamentary form of government, executive and legislative functions of the government are interwoven. Certain members of the parliament are also ministers appointed to supervise the administration of the executive departments. In a "question period," ministers stand before the parliament to respond to questions from the members of parliament regarding that administration. The state Legislature has provided statutes for exercising its formal inquiry powers, including the service of process and the administration of oaths for testimony.

Summary of Bill: During a regular session in an odd-numbered year, the House of Representatives shall dissolve into a committee-of-the-whole to receive reports by elected officials, appointed heads of agencies, or representatives of multi-member boards or commissions and to examine these officials concerning the conduct of the statutory responsibilities of their agencies. An agency must be

requested to report on its statutory operations and to respond to questions from members of the House if at least one-fourth of the members of each caucus agree to the request.

Under rules adopted by the House, caucuses or members must specify any specific subjects about which they intend to inquire in connection with the report of an agency. Following a report by the agency to the committee-of-the-whole, any member of the House may, subject to the rules of the House, freely inquire about those subjects for which prior notice has been provided to the agency. The Speaker must arrange the date and time at which the House will receive such a report from an agency and provide the agency with adequate prior notice of the subjects about which the members of the House intend to inquire. Full transcripts of these proceedings are to be included as part of the official journal of the House.

For any agency the head of which is directly responsible to the Governor or to another state elected official, the Governor or that official: may decline to permit the attendance of any representative of the agency; may designate any other person to attend and report on behalf of the agency in place of the person requested; or may designate additional persons to attend and respond on behalf of the agency. If an official declines to attend the committee-of-the-whole at the date and time requested by the Speaker or refuses to respond to specific subjects about which prior notice was provided, the House may initiate formal proceedings for legislative inquiry.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The bill is an attempt to address the shift in power that has occurred since statehood toward the executive branch of state government. It is patterned after the British question period.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Ralph Munro, Secretary of State (in favor); and Chuck Sauvage, Common Cause (in favor).