The first provision, in paragraph (1) of standing order 72, has been in the standing orders since they were first adopted in 1903, and was designed to allow senators to ask other senators about the progress of their bills and other business they had initiated. The provision for questions to chairs of committees is in paragraph (2) of standing order 72, and was adopted in 1975 after a practice of putting questions to chairs had developed to allow senators to ask committees about the progress of their inquiries. Questions to chairs may be put only on notice or by leave; these restrictions were designed to safeguard a further restriction that chairs must answer only on behalf of their committees.

These provisions have seldom been used in modern times, and on the rare occasions when they are used, they are not used for their original intended purposes.

Question time is now an occasion for questions to ministers. The committee believes that the Senate should consider amending the standing orders to reflect that primary purpose of question time, and to abolish the provisions for questions to other senators and to chairs of committees. The committee suggests that the Senate adopt this change as a temporary order until the end of 2008, after which the committee will review the change to ascertain whether it has caused any inconvenience to the Senate or senators, before recommending whether it should be adopted as a permanent change.

Attachment 3 shows the necessary amendments of the standing order, and the committee recommends that the amended standing order be adopted as a temporary order until the end of 2008.

DEPUTY CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES

Readers of the standing orders have occasionally been confused by the relationship between subparagraphs (b) and (d) of paragraph (9) of standing order 25 relating to the legislative and general purpose standing committees. Paragraph (9) provides for the chairs and deputy chairs of committees. Subparagraph (b) specifies who is to be elected as the deputy chair of each committee, while subparagraph (d) indicates that the deputy chair is to act as chair when the chair is absent or the position of chair is vacant. Subparagraph (d), however, begins with a phrase to the effect that each committee is to elect a deputy chair, and this is sometimes mistaken as the primary provision relating to the election of the deputy chair. To avoid this possible confusion, the committee recommends that subparagraph (d) be amended as follows:

> ~~Each committee shall elect one of its members as its deputy chair, and the member so elected~~ **The deputy chair** shall act as the chair of the committee when the member elected as chair is absent from a meeting of the committee or the position of chair is temporarily vacant.