



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Friday, September 25, 2009
10:02 a.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-5

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat (PC), Chair
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC), Deputy Chair

Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC)
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC) *
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)

* substitution for Fred Horne

Legislative Officers

G.B. (Gord) Button	Ombudsman
Fred Dunn	Auditor General
Lorne R. Gibson	Chief Electoral Officer
Neil R. Wilkinson	Ethics Commissioner
Frank Work, QC	Information and Privacy Commissioner

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Louise J. Kamuchik	Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
Micheline S. Gravel	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Erin Norton	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Communications Services
Melanie Friesacher	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
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Stephanie LeBlanc	Legal Research Officer
Diana Staley	Research Officer
Rachel Stein	Research Officer
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we're on the record now. I'd like to call the meeting to order. I'd like to welcome everyone here. I trust that everyone has a copy of the meeting materials, which were posted on the committee website this past Monday.

I'd also like to ask that we introduce ourselves for the record before we get started with our agenda. I'll start with Mr. Lund.

Mr. Lund: Ty Lund, MLA, Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Campbell: Robin Campbell, MLA, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Olson: Verlyn Olson, MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Marz: Richard Marz, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thomas Lukaszuk, Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. MacDonald: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Blakeman: Laurie Blakeman, and I'd like to welcome you all to the fabulous fall, sunny, wonderful day in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: Len Mitzel, chair and MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Also, for the record Mr. Olson is substituting for Mr. Horne.

As a note, too, Mr. Bhullar just joined the meeting.

We have on here the agenda. You see the agenda. Could I have a motion to approve the agenda, please?

Mr. Lund: So moved.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. Lund. All in favour? Opposed? That's carried.

The next item on the agenda is the approval of the July 2 minutes. Are there any errors or omissions on the July 2 minutes? Hearing none, would someone move that we approve that motion? Moved by Mr. Marz. All in favour? Opposed? That's carried.

Okay. I guess the other items now are on Other Business. The first one is the 2008 COGEL conference report. This report was included in the 2008-2009 LAO annual report, and it's for information purposes only.

The next item is the report on the 2008-09 audit exit meeting at the office of the Auditor General. The Deputy Chair and I attended the audit exit meeting at the office of the Auditor General in late August, and we also invited our newly appointed auditor from the firm of St. Arnaud Pinsent Steman to attend as well. There are no issues to report with respect to the Auditor General's annual financial statements, and copies of the final audit report and the financial statements are available on the committee's internal website under Documents and Resources for members' review.

Item 4(c), the Auditor General's resignation. This also is an information item. Mr. Dunn did speak to me and the Deputy Chair about his term of office at the close of the audit exit meeting, and he advised that he would not be pursuing reappointment for a further term. There will be a committee struck when the House reconvenes to search for a new candidate for this position.

Item 4(d), the office of the Ethics Commissioner, the notice of

recruitment and contract requirements. Mr. Wilkinson requested an order of this committee exempting the office of the Ethics Commissioner from compliance with a directive issued pursuant to the Public Service Act restricting hiring within the public service. This is with respect to the position of senior administrator, a position currently held by Karen South, who will be retiring in April of 2010, as well as for contract services required for financial and human resource services now provided by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Subsequently, Mr. Wilkinson was advised by the Public Service Commission that so long as we are cognizant of the economic conditions and aware of the hiring restrictions in place within the government of Alberta, we are not bound by these restrictions. This, again, is for information purposes.

Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for that. I'm just going back to item 4(c), the resignation of the Auditor General and his notification that he would not be seeking a second term. Do we have in place any ability to do an exit interview with the individual themselves, or could we possibly organize that with one of the executive human resource staff that we have? I mean, that's very common in the business sector, that you would do an exit interview with a fairly high-level manager that was leaving to glean any insights that you could. Sometimes people feel they can speak more freely or outline things they couldn't do before. Have we considered doing that? We might be able to glean some interesting insights.

The Chair: I guess, no, we haven't done that, but I certainly think that that's appropriate. We could ask him if he's willing to meet with us and if we can fit them in.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Or at the very least with maybe a delegation. I don't know if it needs to be a firing squad, and that's not the intention, obviously. I'm just looking for insight and advice to the committee about how we could do things better.

The Chair: Well, what we do have – and it'll be later on – certainly, are reports. When they meet with us and give their year-end reports, that might be a time when that could be asked of him. Are you thinking of something specific, specifically an interview?

Ms Blakeman: No. I'm thinking of an exit interview. Maybe we could get some advice from human resources about how that usually goes or if that's ever been done before.

The Chair: According to his letter I think it would be sometime in the early spring.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

The Chair: So there certainly is some time for that.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

The Chair: We will follow up. Okay?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The Chair: Anything else?

Okay. Well, that takes us to item 5, the date of the next meeting, really, to review the 2010-2011 budget submissions and business plans of the officers of the Legislature. That's what I was speaking to a moment ago. Members were asked to bring their November and

December calendars, and I'd like to start off by suggesting either Friday November 6 or Friday November 20.

Mr. MacDonald: That's the day you're having your leadership review, November 6, isn't it, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Looks like you are paying more attention to it than we are. Are you coming?

Mr. MacDonald: If I could get observer status, maybe.

10:10

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. What's the timing that you're looking at for this? Because it's also the Friday before the constituency week.

The Chair: That's correct.

Ms Blakeman: So timing?

Mr. Marz: What's the date?

The Chair: Well, I just asked for two dates. We can change them if they don't fit. The 6th and the 20th, I believe, are the two that I had suggested. Last year we did need the whole day.

Mr. Marz: Does it have to be a Friday?

The Chair: Well, we're in session, and it took a whole day last time to meet with the five legislative officers and talk about the business plans.

Mr. Campbell: Instead of doing a Friday, could we do, like, a couple of mornings while we're sitting?

The Chair: Well, that became an issue as well, you know, with preparations for session.

Ms Blakeman: We can do nights but not mornings.

Mr. Campbell: Yeah. We can maybe do a couple of nights.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Mr. Chair, I think one of the issues we ran into – and we have done it where we've done one or two officers each day for a week span, kind of thing – is that it lands up drawing the process out even more. We don't make any decisions until we are finished all of those meetings because usually there's a bit of comparison. You know, there are a lot of services that they all share and that type of thing, so decisions aren't made until we're finished, and it makes it more difficult for comparison purposes.

Mr. Campbell: Why are we looking at November? Why aren't we looking at October?

The Chair: They have to have time to get their business reports together.

Mr. Lukaszuk: What's wrong with November 20? Is that conflicting with anybody? I'm good.

Mr. Bhullar: It doesn't work for me, but if it works for the majority, go ahead.

Mr. Marz: Well, let's do it November 20.

The Chair: November 20, then.

Ms Blakeman: What are we looking at? Nine till, 10 till . . .

The Chair: Probably 9 until 3 or 4. Last year I think we even went longer. I think it was probably 5:30.

Mr. Campbell: Could we start earlier, then, and end earlier? I mean, we're here anyways because we're here Thursday. I would suggest that we start at 8 and then get done by . . .

Mrs. Sawchuk: Eight till 3?

Mr. Campbell: Well, yeah. If we can get out of here earlier, then we get to go home for the weekend versus being stuck on Friday at 4 o'clock trying to get out of the city.

The Chair: The suggestion has been made that we start a bit earlier than 9 o'clock, and the suggestion is perhaps at 8 o'clock. What's the feeling of the committee?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Eight o'clock in the morning?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I like coming home at that time, but . . .

The Chair: Okay. The suggestion is that we start earlier than 9 o'clock, just try it at 8 o'clock, because we're here anyway on the Friday, and then maybe we can be finished earlier in the afternoon.

Ms Blakeman: I've got to shift some stuff, but this much in advance I can probably shift it.

Mr. Marz: We're getting so scheduled on so many things. There are a lot of morning meetings. People want to meet with you ahead of time, and you've got to shift that ahead to 7 o'clock. I don't know. If we get out of here at 4 o'clock, you're in a traffic jam until 5:30 anyways, so it just takes you that much longer to get out of town. It doesn't make much difference on the end time to me. I'd favour 9 o'clock, but whatever.

The Chair: Would a compromise of 8:30 work?

Mr. Marz: I said whatever.

Mr. Campbell: I'd start at 7 if we could.

The Chair: Okay. I think to wrap this up, it sounds like 8:30 on November 20 will be the meeting.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I didn't have any information about Mr. Horne's schedule, so I'll just pass this information on to him.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. We have to let the officers know.

There's another thing here. We don't have a definite date for submission of the budget estimates, but it's anticipated that it could be in early December. I think we worked on that last year. I think we do need to let the officers know when their budget submissions have to be ready and the date of the committee meeting. Does the

committee wish to impart any specific direction to the officers with respect to their preparation of the budget estimates; for example, status quo, increases, decreases? The financial people have been calling from each department now. They've said that they haven't had any direction – and they haven't – but they said that they're also working in a vacuum, and this is why I'm opening it up now. I want to have a discussion on: should we try to provide some indication of where they should go so that they're not all over the map and, really, what the committee's expectations are? Because it stops here; we have to review and approve those committees.

Ms Blakeman: Last year it was the President of the Treasury Board that was giving the numbers, so maybe you want to ask the President of the Treasury Board if he has a particular dictate for the groups.

I think you should let them put in their budget submissions and see what they need, and then we can argue it from there rather than telling them to do something else.

The Chair: Well, the point is that they've been asking, and they've had no direction from anybody. Absolutely.

Ms Blakeman: Not even the President of the Treasury Board?

The Chair: No, no. Otherwise they wouldn't have called.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think that since they're calling and asking, we need to give them a feeling of where this might go. Given the situation that we have in the province, I would suggest that we recommend to them that they hold the line. Then we will see when their budget comes in where exactly they're at.

Quite frankly, if we let them just do all the work of going through and coming with a budget that is unacceptable, we're going to spend hours to say no. I would much sooner give them that direction of zero increase. That way they can let us know what it is that they can do with that amount of money. If they have any new initiatives, they can mention those, but we may not be able to fund them. I would appreciate it if we would just give them that direction – I shouldn't use the word "direction." I guess word it more that we give them some indication of a zero budget being something that we would be kind of expecting.

The Chair: Any other comments?

Mr. Marz: I couldn't have said it better myself. I would agree with everything Mr. Lund said.

The Chair: Any other comments?

Hearing none, I take that no comment as, well, this is the type of direction that they may get, and that would be, you know, to certainly try and hold the line on what the approved budgets were for last year.

Mr. Campbell: I wouldn't say to try to hold the line; I'd just tell them to hold the line.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I think there's a parameter for them now.

Anything else? Hearing nothing, a motion to adjourn? Moved by Mr. Lund. All in favour? Thank you, and we'll be reconvening very shortly.

[The committee adjourned at 10:19 a.m.]

