

Title: Wednesday, March 9, 2005 Public Accounts Committee

Date: 05/03/09

Time: 08:30 a.m.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like now to please call this Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting to order.

My name is Hugh MacDonald, the chair of the committee, and the vice-chair of the committee is George VanderBurg from Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

I think we'll perhaps start with George and go around the table and introduce ourselves to each other and to Mr. Dunn and his staff.

[The following members introduced themselves: Rev. Abbott, Ms Blakeman, Mr. Bonko, Mr. Chase, Mr. Danyluk, Mr. Eggen, Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Hinman, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Lindsay, Mr. Oberle, Mr. Prins, Mr. Rodney, Mr. Rogers, Mr. VanderBurg, and Mr. Webber]

[The following staff of the Auditor General's office introduced themselves: Mr. Dunn, Mr. Hug, and Mr. Saher]

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Good morning. It's nice to meet you all. I'm Corinne Dacyshyn, the committee clerk.

The Chair: Corinne has been the committee clerk for Public Accounts since 1990, and she does an excellent job.

Now, there are a few I think housekeeping items that we should discuss. Certainly, there are refreshments. There is coffee; there's juice; there are muffins.

Rev. Abbott: Bacon and eggs?

The Chair: No bacon and eggs, Tony. Only if we go to Drayton Valley will we get bacon and eggs.

Rev. Abbott: You've got it.

The Chair: Okay.

The rules are much more relaxed than in the Legislative Assembly. Each member can choose, if they wish, to leave and replenish their coffee or have a muffin, but let's be respectful of the other members and the ministers, whenever they do show up here with their staff, and also be respectful to the Auditor General and his staff. It's much more relaxed than the Assembly, again, but we have to be respectful of not only each other's views but time and attention.

Now, agenda packages and annual reports were distributed to all committee members last Thursday afternoon.

At this time I would also like to welcome Dr. Ted Morton, who is sitting next to Mr. Rodney down there. Good morning, Dr. Morton.

Dr. Morton: Good morning.

The Chair: I would note that the first part of the meeting will be an organizational meeting, and then the Auditor General has an orientation presentation to make to the committee.

Could I please have approval of the agenda that was circulated?

Mr. Rogers: So moved, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, George. Thank you.

Now, when we talk about the organization of this committee, we are governed by Standing Order 50. The public accounts, when

tabled, are referred to the Public Accounts Committee. This committee examines ministry expenditures from the previous fiscal year using the most current ministry and Auditor General annual reports; that is, 2003-2004. The date and the time of these committee meetings is set. It's 8:30 to 10 each Wednesday when the House is in session.

The scope of questions by members. We generally steer away from policy questions, and we keep questions to the year under review in the respective ministry or department annual reports. The tradition for questions has been one supplementary question. There are two questions from each member, and they alternate between government and opposition, and it's been a tradition that we start with the opposition. If this morning's attendance is any indication, the chair would really appreciate it if we could keep our preambles brief because I suspect that there's going to be a keen interest by all members in asking questions, and the shorter the preambles are, the more time questions will have to be addressed.

Now, the schedule for review of 2003-2004 ministry and annual reports and the Auditor General's report is certainly going to progress here. I'm pleased to say that we do have meetings scheduled with ministers. They have been very gracious this time. I'm delighted to inform you that we have a schedule completed right up until May 18. Other years it has been very difficult to get ministers to appear before us on short notice, but this year it has just been excellent, and we appreciate their co-operation and their work with the committee clerk. I will be handing out a schedule – pardon me; Corinne has done that, and we appreciate that – and I would also advise you that we have sent a letter inviting the Premier to meet with the committee on any Wednesday that his schedule will allow.

If you notice that the Finance minister is not on that list, it has been sort of a tradition of this Assembly. The Finance minister has usually been busy preparing the budget and presenting the budget in the House, so we have given the Finance minister a lot of leniency in appearing before the committee. Hopefully, in the fall the hon. minister will be scheduled. It will not happen this spring.

Also, I would like to bring to members' attention that any Member of the Legislative Assembly is welcome to participate in the proceedings of this committee. They just cannot vote on any matters, but certainly all hon. members of the Assembly are welcome to attend meetings and participate if they wish.

Mr. VanderBurg: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. VanderBurg: Do we pass the standing committee schedule? Do we formally pass a motion that this is the schedule for this spring?

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Not usually.

Mr. VanderBurg: Not usually? Okay.

The Chair: But we could if you wish. It may be difficult in that there may be a few changes in this for one reason or another. One ministry may change on short notice with another. But if you want to, it's at your discretion.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I guess, you know, just to keep the ministers' feet to the fire and make sure that they know these are the dates, I'd rather confirm it.

So moved that we accept the list as presented.

8:40

The Chair: Mr. VanderBurg has so moved to accept this list that has circulated. Mr. Rodney.

Mr. Rodney: I'd be happy to second that motion.

The Chair: We don't require a second.

Mr. Rodney: We don't need them here? Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All those in favour of the motion by Mr. VanderBurg? Opposed? Motion carried. Thank you.

Now, the committee's report on activities. A copy included in the orientation packages is for information only. Our committee cannot approve the report.

Yes, Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Chairperson. I'm just wondering if there is any discussion permitted from the items that you've just gone through.

The Chair: Oh, certainly.

Ms Blakeman: I noticed that you'd moved onto the next agenda item without offering us an opportunity to comment.

The Chair: I apologize.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm wondering if there has been any thought by members on the committee to expanding the mandate. The chairperson has referenced in the agenda Standing Order 50, which is what creates this committee and empowers it, but Standing Order 50 is either very limited or very expansive depending on how you look at it. It simply says that we shall meet once the reports have been tabled. There are a lot of traditions attached to this particular committee, which have been outlined by the chairperson.

But I think there are also some opportunities there, and I am particularly interested in a discussion, which may better fall later – I'll take your advice, Mr. Chairperson – on whether we have the budget to meet outside of session. I think it's problematic for this committee that we only meet when we're in session, and therefore our ability to scrutinize all of the government ministries is limited by the number of weeks that we are, in fact, in session. If we wish to entertain the idea of scrutinizing other departments – you see that the list that's presented to us today in fact only covers eight ministries, and by the fall we would be examining the next year's public accounts. So for the examination of the 2003-2004 annual reports from 24 ministries this list is going to limit us to examining only eight ministries, one-third of all government ministries.

So I'd like the committee to consider meeting outside of the session, whether that's additional meetings that we hold while we're in session or whether we agree to meet outside of session. I think it's incumbent upon us to put in a better attempt to try and scrutinize. We haven't even reached 50 per cent here of the government ministries that exist.

If you need a motion, I'm happy to put a motion on the floor for discussion. Do you need a motion?

The Chair: Not at this time but perhaps later, Ms Blakeman. There have been a few hands appear who are interested in discussing this issue further.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, it's an interesting point that the member makes, but the logistics of getting the government members together isn't quite so easy off session. We're not all elected in a small little area in this province, as you know, Mr. Chairman. I think that tradition has proven that this committee has served the Legislature and government well, and I would just as soon leave it the way it has been.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Are there any other comments in regard to this?

Mr. Chase: Well, as a novice I'm finding my time constrained, but this is an extremely important committee. We're sort of the external watchdogs, and I think that in order for us to do our business, we should potentially consider while we're here and during the legislative sessions, if need be, running the meeting an extra half hour, starting earlier, whatever, so that while we're here and at a particular time, we can review more of the ministries. I'm a schoolteacher, and 33 per cent is not a passing mark.

The Chair: Thank you. For the record, the chair has been active in trying to reform public accounts in this province. I have made a presentation as a private member to the respective House leaders of the three recognized parties in the Assembly. I haven't heard back from them in regard to changing Standing Orders, frequency of meetings, the length of meetings, meeting outside session, the scope under Standing Order 50. I think this is a comprehensive reform, I think it is needed, but I haven't heard back from the House leaders at this time. I would share my thoughts with each and every member at any time it is convenient for you in regard to this matter.

The committee doesn't have the authority to make recommendations to the Assembly. We certainly, at the will of the committee, in the chair's view, can change the scope of this committee, but it would have to be brought back to the Assembly.

Now, Mr. Griffiths had some comments.

Mr. Griffiths: I have some serious concerns about this given that I live three hours from Edmonton and have to drive back here all the time for meetings. My constituency office is two hours from here. It takes me an hour and a half to drive from my home to my constituency office because it's that large. I have 34 communities that expect to see me all the time, especially when we're not in session. I have 46 elected bodies that want to see me every two and a half months. I'm really concerned about giving up more of my time with my constituents to come up here to have another meeting. I believe we can address the priorities that need to be addressed while we're here in Edmonton during session.

The Chair: Mr. Rodney, and then Mr. Chase.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, chair. I'd like to echo the comments that I've heard just now from our hon. member Mr. Griffiths. I look in front of me, and I see quite an impressive list of ministers coming in. There's been a lot of co-operation in that respect. I know that everyone here wants to co-operate and be as efficient as we possibly can with our time. This system has worked in the past, and I think before we go doing any changes, let's give this a chance, work our best to get this done before it's time to head back to the constituency.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I agree in terms of efficiency and coming back outside of session. It's a long drive, but it's my preference to drive from Calgary. I would prefer to extend the sessions while we're here. That's why I offered the start at 8 o'clock or run till 10:30 suggestion so that we could get a little bit more of the people's business conducted.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Danyluk: Just one small point and maybe a question. We do have the ministers that are lined up, we do have a full slate, and you are booked up till May 18. Nobody knows when session is going to be over. I mean, we can continue to book with anticipation when session is going to be over, so that does also provide some leniency and some leeway.

The Chair: Yes. When session ended last spring, we had discussed with 10 ministers their annual reports and the recommendations from the Auditor General, only 10 of 24. This is a public oversight committee. Hon. members are correct in pointing out that we don't have time to meet with all ministries, and this year it is doubtful if we get much past, if at all, May 18. We will have three, four ministries in the fall if there's a fall session, and that will be it. But there certainly is in my personal view a need for more frequency of meetings so that we can talk to every minister.

Mr. Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Just as a point of clarification for myself. This is the first time sitting on this committee. Is it possible that we can bring other ministers to this committee if necessary? You know, if perhaps there's a specific thing that we need to deal with, can other people be brought in on an ad hoc basis?

8:50

The Chair: No. The chair has had difficulty in the last term scheduling ministers. Some ministers were to appear and just refused. In the short time that Corinne has compiled this list, it's a record. We really appreciate the co-operation from the departments. We only meet on Wednesdays, and we only meet when the Legislative Assembly is in session, so we're very restricted. Ms Blakeman is right. We have a very limited mandate. If the hon. members would like to put a motion forward to change that, it's your business and your decision.

Yes, Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. Has everyone now spoken to this that was interested? I'll speak to close debate and to move the motion.

The Chair: No. Mr. Lindsay would like to speak.

Ms Blakeman: Go ahead.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess just in regard to the request to extend the meetings by half an hour, I'm not sure if that's going to be a big advantage to us because it appears that we only meet with one minister per day in any event, so I don't really see the advantage of that at this time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Rev. Abbott to finish discussion.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Chairman. That was going to be my

suggestion. Perhaps we could have two ministries on a given Wednesday, and then we could review more of them in the session times that we're here.

The other thought, I guess, is that, you know, perhaps we should revisit this at another time because other than yourself and Ms Blakeman none of us have been on this committee before, so we don't even know if it is enough time or if it's too much time or maybe we'll have to sit here and make up questions after half an hour. We're not sure. So maybe this isn't the best time to be saying, you know, that we don't have enough time to conduct our business because, really, we don't know that.

The Chair: Sure. That's a good suggestion. If in three weeks or so the committee would like to have a short discussion at the end of one of our meetings, that's fine.

Yes, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think Reverend Abbott was reading my mind. I was of the same opinion. We haven't even yet gotten started. I think it behooves us to sort of get going and see how it goes before we start trying to basically recreate we don't even know what at this point. As a brand new member, my first time around this table, I'd either have to vote against this motion or abstain because I really have no clue what it takes to run this committee. I'm looking forward to seeing what it entails before we start changing the terms right off the bat.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Would any of the members of this committee like to hear from other public accounts committees? For instance, the chairperson of the federal Public Accounts Committee in Ottawa is from St. Albert, Mr. Williams. Would you like to hear what he has to say about public accounts and Public Accounts Committee meetings? Certainly, at your direction I could write a letter to him and ask him for a bit of his time some morning if you'd like, you know, while we're getting started here.

Yes?

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect I certainly would hope that in Alberta we do a much better job than they do at the federal level, so I'm personally not interested in that analogy at all.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Morton: I worked with John Williams in Ottawa before. You're absolutely right about the general conduct of matters in Ottawa, but John Williams on the Public Accounts Committee there is one of the nice exceptions. I know that in the Australian parliament, where I've spent some time as well, the public accounts committee is a very important function for public accountability there too. So I think that bringing John Williams in, particularly for all of the new people, of which I am one, would be a good educational experience.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. VanderBurg: I'm not trying to promote that we should travel to Australia and see how things are done, but maybe there could be an exception to going on the road.

Mr. Chairman, I do think we have a lot of new members here. Let's just take it cool, and let's get a month under our belts and then have a discussion after a meeting before we do anything out of the normal.

The Chair: Okay. Fine.
Ms Blakeman to close.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. Just a few remarks, based on what I've heard this morning. Thank you all for the participation, and I am pleased to hear that we're willing to revisit this in a few weeks' time.

I'm sure that all of the new members, being avid readers of *Hansard* – please be aware that the *Hansard* people are working with us today and that all of the *Hansards* from previous Public Accounts meetings are available for you to review. So if you're feeling that you don't know what happens in these committees, which some of you had expressed, please take the opportunity to read the *Hansard* of past committees, and that will help you get a better understanding of how many speakers are left on the list at the end of many of the meetings – I remember that's been noted before – and some of the business that we've been unable to conduct.

I think my major concern particularly in this year is that we will only be examining eight ministries for the 2003-2004 fiscal year. By the fall sitting we are examining the next year's public accounts. We did not have a fall sitting this year, as you remember, so these are the only ministries that we will be looking at for the 2003-2004 year.

I'm aware that people have great constraints on their time outside of session, but I'll also point out that when I first started – I'm now in my ninth year of sitting on this committee – we were in session for almost four weeks longer than we now seem to be in session and were able to examine four more ministries than we are now looking at examining. My first couple of years out we were looking at 13 or 14 ministries, and now we're looking at eight.

So for those of you that feel you need more time in your constituency, you are getting more time in your constituency. You're getting about four more weeks or even six more weeks than we used to, so I think maybe you could squeeze a couple of mornings out of those extra weeks that you're now getting to come back and have a meeting. We're here on behalf of the taxpayers of Alberta. It's an important committee, and I would like to see us spend the time needed to do a good job.

It is possible, by the way, and we did consider it last time in looking at those ministries that didn't have a lot of issues raised by the Auditor General, to look at doing two of them in one day. It was a possibility we discussed last time. Maybe that's a possibility for us to look at in the fall.

I'm glad to hear we're going to revisit it, and thank you very much for the discussion.

The Chair: No further comments on this agenda item? Thank you. That was a very interesting discussion.

Now if we could continue with agenda item 4. Our committee cannot approve the report on activities of a committee in existence before an election. I will table this in the Assembly as a regular member, not as chairperson of this committee. Those are the rules. We never had an opportunity to table the last report because there was no fall session. Okay? Any further discussion on item 4?

Seeing none, item 5, the committee budget for the year 2005-2006. We require a motion to submit this budget to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services for approval. Under the Members' Services Committee orders, members are not entitled to receive committee allowances for meetings during session, so it is different than a lot of other committees in that regard. The travel portion refers to the conference travel for attendance at the joint Conference of Legislative Auditors and Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees to be held later this year. Delegate selection

will take place when the official invitation has been received from the hosting jurisdiction. The budget has been circulated. Is it possible, please, to have a motion to submit that? Mr. Bonko?

Mr. Bonko: I so move, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. Moved by Mr. Bonko that the 2005-2006 Standing Committee on Public Accounts budget estimate be approved in the amount of \$21,000 as submitted.

Ms Blakeman: Speaking against the motion. In passing this motion, we'd be essentially negating the previous conversation in that if we are to consider in some couple of weeks meeting outside of session, the budget would have to reflect that. I mean, obviously I don't require travel monies, but others may. Perhaps the clerk could outline for us what the additional costs would be if we were looking at meeting outside of session. But if we pass this today, then we've already made up our minds that we would not be meeting outside of session, which I think is most regrettable.

Could the clerk enlighten us?

9:00

The Chair: Perhaps, Ms Blakeman, we could ask the clerk. For instance, in the province of Ontario their Public Accounts Committee has a different format, a different budget. We could ask the committee clerk to report next Wednesday or circulate a letter with that information to each respective member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, then we have to table this motion.

The Chair: The clerk has a suggestion.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Our office has been advised that we require a motion to pass this budget because the Members' Services Committee will be meeting before the end of March in order to pass the Legislative Assembly budgets. Perhaps the way around this would be – this is my suggestion – that we pass this budget the way it is so that it could go to Members' Services with the understanding that if we required additional money for out-of-session meetings – and that would be the only expense other than travel costs for members to come in for those meetings – we could take it from the overall committee budget envelope. We've done that before. If we run short of money on one committee, we can take it from another committee. For some of our other committees that meet out of session, we budget those meetings for a hundred per cent attendance. So we do have a little leeway there. As long as we take it from our overall committee budget envelope, we do have that leeway to do that. I understand your concern, as well.

That's my comment.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Danyluk.

Mr. Danyluk: Just a question, if I can, to the chair. When you talked about the conference – and I noticed in the documentation that there were two attendees that went to Fredericton for the conference – is there a set rule or, I guess, a set regulation of who attends and how many attend? I don't know. I'm sorry, I'm a neophyte in this, as well.

The Chair: It has been the tradition that the chair and in some cases the vice-chair and the committee clerk attend the Public Accounts Committee. In my term as chair of Public Accounts Committee I have refused to attend those conferences. It is my personal form of

protest against the fact that we don't have a budget to meet out of session. It is my view, not the view of the committee. So we have always selected another member of the committee, not necessarily on party affiliation, to attend the conference as well as the clerk and the vice-chair. So I have not attended, and I do not intend to start attending these committee meetings. I think it's more important – this is again my personal view; it's not reflective of the committee – that if we're going to be spending money on travel, perhaps we should be spending it on travel to help you get from Bonnyville-Cold Lake or from Wainwright to meetings that would be held out of session.

If anyone is interested, I believe the conference this year will be in Niagara-on-the-Lake. If any members want to go, we'll put the names in a hat, and we'll pull one out, and we'll also pull out an alternate, hopefully, because in the past sometimes travel arrangements have been made and members could not attend. So it's always good to have an alternate person.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Just to clarify, I think that there have usually been three people sent. The budget has covered three people, whether it's the actual person or an alternate or a designate, representing the chair, the vice-chair, and the clerk. If those three individuals didn't go, then there were arrangements made, whether drawing from a hat or the individual themselves designating someone else to go in their place. The amounts tend to go up and down because I believe that the conferences flip back and forth east/west. So, obviously, when they're closer to our side of the country, they are less expensive for us to get to, and when they're in Newfoundland and New Brunswick, they are more expensive for us to get to. So you'll watch the budgets go up and down a bit, depending on whether it's a conference in the east or in the west.

Mr. Danyluk: So my question is definitely in regard to the budget estimates, the question being: does this budget, then, reflect three individuals going?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, it does.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Do we have a motion on the floor?

The Chair: We do, and it's a motion for the agenda to be changed.

An Hon. Member: Mr. Bonko moved that we pass it as submitted.

The Chair: As submitted? Okay. Any further discussion?

Dr. Morton: I'm not clear what the motion on the floor is.

The Chair: The motion is that the 2005-2006 Standing Committee on Public Accounts budget estimates be approved in the amount of \$21,000 as submitted.

Mr. Chase: Is it possible to amend the motion to include the clerk's suggestion for alternate funding? What I'm getting at is: can we submit the budget knowing that further resources are available, or should we extend outside the committee?

The Chair: Could you repeat that, please?

Mr. Chase: I'm hoping that this would be a friendly amendment to include the clerk's suggestion that we submit the budget with the knowledge that should further expenses be required, they will be made available through alternate committee financing.

The Chair: Yeah. That's fine.

Mr. Chase: That's an acceptable amendment?

Mr. Oberle: Wouldn't you, in fact, be then approving an open-ended budget? The mechanism already exists. Why would you need to mention it in the motion?

The Chair: You have a valid point.

Mr. Rodney: I have to agree with the hon. member. It seems to me – and I don't mean to make an inflammatory remark – that we can't be writing any kind of blank cheques. As you've mentioned, there is a precedent, if I may say, to go to the well on at least one other occasion. It's understood that that's what we do if we do need more funds. I think that if we do pass this right now, if we have future needs, we'll address them at that time.

So I don't think that the amendment is required. That's my point.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Chase: Based on the astute observations, I'll withdraw the amendment.

The Chair: Okay. So we're back to the original motion as quoted in the agenda. Any further discussion? May I have a vote on the motion, please. Those in favour? Those opposed? Noted. Motion carried.

Now we have item 6 on the agenda, and that's the orientation presentation by the Auditor General, Mr. Fred Dunn. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is silent on the role of the Auditor General in the proceedings, but it has become quite a tradition, and we always welcome the Auditor General and his staff. You can set your watch at 20 after 8 each Wednesday morning during session. Rain, sun, snow, they're there. They're prepared; they're ready. On behalf of the Committee I would just like to say thank you.

Please proceed with your presentation.

9:10

Mr. Dunn: Thank you. The clerk is handing out some material, and I'm going to move to the front if that's okay. I want to go through a PowerPoint presentation with you, and you'll get the slides in this handout material. So you should have in this handout material that's coming around the slides that I'll be going through. Then I plan to go through some other matters which I hope will make this committee more effective.

First of all, I want to thank everyone for being here and being prepared to go through this orientation. We believe that this committee is a very, very important committee. When I joined the office of the Auditor General two and a half years ago and started to attend these committee meetings, I was, I guess, a little bit interested as to how the performance produced effectiveness. I didn't always see the preparation and the attentiveness and the perception within some of the questions that I was used to from my private-sector days. Having worked with audit committees and boards of directors in the private sector, I wasn't quite sure how this committee could

show itself to be effective. So what we hope today, since we're starting with so many new members, is to be able to help you improve on that effectiveness as we go forward. I notice from their background that we have a lot of former teachers. Hopefully, you'll take this in the tone in which it is meant: to be helpful to all of you as you go through in your new role on this committee.

Our theme in a nutshell is this: "An effective [Public Accounts Committee] requires skilled and interested MLAs with a commitment to work in a non-partisan fashion." And I emphasize "non-partisan fashion." I and my office are here to assist the Public Accounts Committee in improving on its effectiveness. This theme was delivered by my office, myself, at the August 2004 CCPAC – that's the conference which is held nationally each year in New Brunswick – to representatives of all Canadian Public Accounts Committees: the federal, the provincial, and the territorial committees at that time. The presentation was jointly delivered by myself and the former vice-chair of this committee, Mr. Shiraz Shariff. We jointly presented to all committees across the country, and the Alberta flavour, I must say, was well received.

What I plan to go through is the background, the role of the Public Accounts Committee, results, tools that we have included in this brief handout, advice on effectiveness, and changes which will tie into what you have just been discussing, changes in the way in which our reporting could affect the operations of this committee. So having just listened to your discussion, I think it was a good decision to table the motion to look forward to what changes may have to take place that result in the way in which the government is itself structured and the way in which we are reporting on that. Then some conclusions, and then we'll talk about next steps.

You've got in your handout material that came from the committee clerk some background on this committee. The committee has 17 members, more than most public accounts committees have. You've heard that it meets only when the House is in session, which historically has been somewhat between 11 and 13 times. So last year when it met 10 times, it was because we did not have a fall session, when there would have been at least another two or three meetings of this committee. The resource materials that you will be looking at are the annual reports from the ministries and the latest annual report from the office of the Auditor General.

So what you will start out with next week or the week following next – you'll be looking at the ministry of human resources. You will get or already should have received the annual report from the ministry, which includes all the various funds, departments, agencies, boards, commissions that are responsible to that minister. All are contained in this binder. That binder includes the minister's responsibility statements, it includes performance measures, it includes nonfinancial information, it includes audited financial information, and it includes certain unaudited information. It takes a while to go through each of these binders.

In addition, you'll look at a section in our annual report, this big coil binder that you have, which is structured by way of each ministry. So you'll see that there are sections or components in here which deal with each ministry. So you will look at that section, and you'll read about the comments, the recommendations we have on that ministry.

As you're already aware, we will focus on the operations of one ministry. Unusual is that the minister is in attendance. So Alberta is different compared to many other jurisdictions. Many other jurisdictions do not have the elected representative, the minister, in attendance. Alberta has the elected representative. It produces a different dynamic. What would happen, historically, here is that you would tend to focus your questions on the minister. You must appreciate that the minister doesn't run all the department's

agencies, boards, and commissions. The real purpose of your questions is to get through the minister down to the public-sector bureaucracy, the management, the mind of management that runs those departments.

Also, with the minister are all the senior staff. They bring their deputy minister, which is the equivalent of the CEO; they bring the chief financial officer, known as the CFO. They're all there, and they prepare to answer your questions. They do go through a great exercise in getting prepared and providing to the minister material that could reference back to a question that may be asked. So when you look at the list of ministries that may be attending, they take a lot of time in preparation for this meeting. I've never seen it where there have been less questions being asked; in other words, we finish early. Normally, as Ms Blakeman has mentioned, there are often a lot of questions that have yet to be answered. So it is a very packed type of meeting, and that's why you like to start effectively at 8:30.

What is different about Alberta? In addition to having the minister in attendance, we also have something which no other jurisdiction has, which is called a Provincial Audit Committee. Are you aware that we have a Provincial Audit Committee? The chair is; he's aware that we have a Provincial Audit Committee. When I made this presentation at the CCPAC meeting, all the other jurisdictions were very, very interested in this.

So on this chart, which is taken from the orientation that we do for the Provincial Audit Committee, that Audit Committee sits on the left hand side, the blue box there. This Audit Committee is comprised of seven people. It's formed under section 21 of my act, by the way; that's how we end up having this structure in play. Under our act is that there shall be established a Provincial Audit Committee comprising no more than seven people. Historically, the only elected member has been the Minister of Finance, but that's not by way of statute; that's mainly by process. It has six senior business leaders, with two or three of those business leaders having financial expertise. We have very, very senior individuals who have a lot of experience in accounting and financial matters, and all members have financial literacy.

The annual report – that's my annual report – and any special report from my office, such as the BSE report, is discussed with this Audit Committee before the final report is presented to the chair of the select standing committee, and when this report is presented to the chair of the select standing committee, it is then presented to each of you through the Speaker.

This Audit Committee meets at least three times per year, normally December or January. So we had our last meeting on January 21, at which time I discussed my intended audit plans for each of the ministries and departments, boards, and commissions, and we discussed any possible unusual accounting changes that may take place within the provincial financial reporting. In June we discuss the province's annual financial statements. That's that big binder, which has both the provincial consolidated financial statements and the item called Measuring Up. Again Alberta is unique in this area. In September we present and discuss all our findings within this annual report. Management is in attendance. It's the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, the Deputy Minister of Finance, and the chief financial officer, the Controller of the province.

Any questions at this point?

9:20

Ms Blakeman: I'm curious because I know that it's important for the Auditor General to develop a strong and respectful working relationship with the departments. Oh, maybe I'm mistaken. Is there another committee beyond what you've got up here? The

Audit Committee: is that the one that's including people from outside, from the private sector?

Mr. Dunn: That is correct. It is essentially all private sector.

Ms Blakeman: The Audit Committee?

Mr. Dunn: The Audit Committee.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm just wondering how much influence that Audit Committee has on the Auditor General and his staff and what you decide to do.

Mr. Dunn: We are responsible for deciding what our audit plans are. Where their influence is most respected is – I've called them the wise person's council – when we've ended up in a discussion or a debate around an accounting policy. One that was affected last year – so the financial statements of the province did change – was around the reporting model. Do you include your capital assets on your financial statements? Having those wise accountants on that committee assisted us in explaining and getting through to the management why it was important to adopt that. They also represent the fact that this is the way it is done in other businesses or organizations. We've found them to be very, very helpful also in helping with the language which we use to make sure that we come through clearly in our communication. So I've found them, myself, very, very helpful, and it's been, I say, very successful on behalf of Alberta to have this structure in place.

I see Mr. Chase down there.

The Chair: I have a question, too, please.

Mr. Chase: Through the chair, Mr. Dunn, is the Audit Committee an ad hoc group? Is it a consultative service, or are these permanent employees?

Mr. Dunn: They are not employees, nor is it ad hoc. They are appointed through the minister, through cabinet. They have to meet certain criteria. They do serve a three-year term and then are open to renewal for another three-year term. Maximum, six years.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dunn, could you list those? There's the Finance minister and then another six individuals. Who are those six individuals, please?

Mr. Saher: Fred, maybe I could help with this. Mr. Chair, the members of the Audit Committee are in fact set out in the Auditor General's annual report. You all have a copy of that report. It's page 352.

The Chair: For the record, who are they?

Mr. Saher: I'll read the names. The chair is Peter Watson. The other members are George Cornish, Harry Schaefer, Don Wilson, Franklin Kobie, John Watson, and the former Finance minister is listed here, the hon. Patricia Nelson.

Mr. Dunn: So the point of what I was explaining here is that we do have this other committee which has a lot of financial knowledge on it. Thus the financial accounting principles, practices, policies adopted by Alberta are really assisted by way of this group. As I

say, I'd like to make sure I do get through this because there are going to be some important parts at the back end of this presentation.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. I just wondered if you had bio information or any other way for us to find out more about who these people are.

Mr. Dunn: We can get that.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much. And you'll put that through to the clerk, and she'll get it to all of us?

Mr. Dunn: We'll put that through to the clerk.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Does Nick Shandro, the chief internal auditor for the province . . .

Mr. Dunn: He does not report to this committee.

The Chair: He does not report to this committee?

Mr. Dunn: He does not report.

The Chair: Who does he report to?

Mr. Dunn: He reports to what's called an internal audit committee, which has six senior deputy ministers plus two external individuals on it. That one follows more a B.C. reporting model, but it still is quite effective.

What I might show here – and this is again taken from the presentation that we did for those other jurisdictions, who were quite interested in how this could take place. I drew a line across the chart here where if you look at the government of Alberta consolidated financial statements, the very large binder that you have with you, together with the annual report Measuring Up – and Alberta is again unique because it's been producing this report for now approximately 12 years. Other jurisdictions are just getting on to doing this type of reporting. Those are reviewed at the Provincial Audit Committee level, and the Provincial Audit Committee does not get down below the consolidated financial statements into the ministry consolidated financial statements.

Below the line is where the Public Accounts Committee has in the past focused its attention on each of the ministries' consolidated financial statements, annual reports. As I've shown you, it's a fairly large publication that gets produced for each ministry, which will include every department, fund, and agency. I commented at the national presentation that I thought it was very effective because we built on the strengths of each of the committees, we built on the strengths of the Audit Committee and their financial literacy, and we also built on the strengths of the Public Accounts Committee and its knowledge of the public sector, public policy, and efficient and effective systems of delivering public service. Just to remind you, no other jurisdiction has this structure. However, many are interested and looking at it as to whether or not it can help improve the effectiveness of their communications in their jurisdiction.

So, as I said, to me this committee is very important. The analogy I've always used is like the private sector's audit committee: are we controlling our operations effectively? But you're only successful if you can operate effectively. Membership on this committee should help you become better MLAs. You obviously get to see a number of ministries, and you get to ask questions of those minis-

tries, and you get to receive an awful lot of information on the conduct of those ministries that many other MLAs would not otherwise have.

The role of this committee is to hold management to account for the actions taken to achieve plans. You want to build on the lessons that have been learned. So as much as we may not see every ministry or every department every year, remember that they do report every year, and you can obviously look at prior years' reports to see what has been trending or changing. At the end of the day you're here to encourage value for money in the use of public resources. That's the bottom line; you're here to improve the value for money. The more effective the Public Accounts Committee is, the better the oversight of the government management by you the MLAs.

What it does do is close the loop on the accountability. As you know, in Alberta we have the annual budget; we have the three-year business plans. Then when you close the loop, you have your annual report against the business plan and against the budget. This is the accountability loop being closed. As I've said, you are concerned with a value for money in the administration of government policy rather than with government policy itself. Government policy, in my opinion, is reserved to the House. You are here to see that there's been efficient and effective execution of government policy.

I'll quote here from *Erskine May*, and it's in some of the material that is otherwise available for view to other public accounts committees. On describing the role of the Public Accounts Committee, he stated, "The committee does not seek to concern itself with policy; its interest is in whether policy is carried out efficiently, effectively and economically."

Just what is our mandate? A lot of questions have been asked in the past about: "Is your scope as wide as other Auditors General? They seem to report differently than you do." The source of our scope is from our Auditor General Act, and it was renewed approximately a year and a half ago. The scope is very wide. We are the auditor of every ministry, department, regulated fund, and provincial agency. So unlike certain other comments you might have read in the media where the Auditor General is denied to get into certain areas, such as the federal government within the endowment funds, we are the auditor of everything. At the back of each ministry's annual report you'll see the list of all the government organizations that come together to form the reporting entity, the government accounts. We audit every one of them. In addition, we audit those that are not yet included in the government's reporting entity but in the future will be included. We audit every university, technical school, college, and six of the nine RHAs. So the Auditor's mandate in Alberta is all inclusive.

9:30

If you look in your tool book, in the material that we handed out to you, you'll see there are some frequently asked questions, and that follows at the end of the slide. Frequently asked question 5 talks about: how wide is the scope of our auditing? As I said, we cover every entity that is involved in the public sector in Alberta.

At the end of the day we produce for you reports on performance information, so you'll see within the annual reports of each ministry that there's nonfinancial information regarding their targets and then their achievement towards those targets. We review those and provide a report on that.

We also provide within this annual report, the big one, areas where they can improve on their systems to become more efficient and effective, and we also report to you any noncompliance with legislation. There are certain situations where a department or organization may not be in compliance with legislation, and the legislation has to change or catch up.

The Chair: Mr. Chase has a question.

Mr. Dunn: Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Yes, Mr. Dunn. I'm just wondering: is there an ethical as well as an economic component to the Auditor General's report?

Mr. Dunn: We do concentrate on ethics and the adherence to the public sector's code of conduct. Yes. So we do look at that.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Mr. Dunn: So building on that, we're responsible for adhering to all of our professional standards: the CICA and all the accounting standards that come out from that sector, the Public Sector Accounting Board. We also look at our own professional code of conduct and the public sector's code of conduct and make sure all those things are complied with.

Rev. Abbott: A quick question. You mentioned six of the nine regional health authorities. I'm wondering why not all nine and also wondering about the school boards.

Mr. Dunn: We do not audit the school boards. There are 62 school boards, public and Catholic school boards, plus 13 charter school boards. Those are all audited by the private sector. However, we do look at the results of those audits, and we include in our annual report the results of us looking over the audits of those other school board auditors, and any matters that we believe are significant from the results of their audits are brought forward into our annual report.

Rev. Abbott: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Dunn: We do not do the other three although it has been open to some question about not doing the other three. We do the big six of the RHAs. There has been some discussion: should we not officially do the audits of the other three? That will be open to some further dialogue with the minister of health.

At the end of the day you are our client. You, the MLAs, are our clients. It's not the management of the departments nor of the organizations. You, the MLAs, are our clients. We do not report to Executive Council. We do not report to the minister although we'll meet with and discuss matters with the minister. We report to the House. Thus, we report to all of you as MLAs.

The important part is that we are here to make sure that you can rely on the information that is provided to you. That's the important part that we can bring to you on the information flow.

We also want to make sure that we can identify opportunities for improving the control over the use of public resources. At the end of the day it's management that will report to you. That's why when management appears with the minister, your questions should be directed through the minister to management. Management reports on the results of their activities: why they set a certain plan in place, why they set certain targets in place, and why they asked for a certain amount of resources to be given to their department or ministry through the supply votes. They report on the results of the consumption of those resources. We add credibility to what they have reported on, and then you decide through this committee and through your role within the House whether or not value for money has been achieved.

One of the important parts of what we look at is to make sure that any weaknesses or problems that are identified don't grow. Something which our office has been very successful at over the

many years is ensuring that our recommendations are well understood and that management will respond to those recommendations and have an action plan to address that matter. This has also produced some questions within the media: “Why don’t you have the blow-ups? Where are all these blow-ups that other people have?” It’s in part because at the end of the day what we look at is implementation of those recommendations.

We’ll follow up on every recommendation we make. Management will respond to us in a written form, the government responds to us on the annual report, and this committee will receive a copy of that through the chair. I believe it will probably be available before your next meeting. They report regarding whether they accept or reject all our numbered recommendations, and we continue to follow up on each and every recommendation until it’s implemented. At the end of the day, if we can implement the recommendations, you can avoid major train wrecks. You can avoid matters becoming a problem which becomes a major blow-up.

If I can then put this comment out. We do have an understanding through the government and through the senior management, which is probably somewhat unique, again, in Canada because the government does listen. It’s our understanding in discussions at the most senior level that all recommendations that have been agreed to will be implemented within a three-year time frame. Once accepted, the department and the ministry will implement those recommendations within three years, and quite often this can be a significant matter that they have to address.

Mr. VanderBurg: Has that been achieved?

Mr. Dunn: Yes. For the most part, that has been achieved. How it has been effected is that it’s become part of the performance measures on the deputy ministers. This was started, certainly, shortly after my arrival. We sat down and we had an agreement as to what our expectations were, and I certainly accepted. What was stated or offered was: would you be satisfied if all agreed-to recommendations were implemented within three years? I said yes.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Dunn, it was noted at the beginning that due to the Premier’s extremely busy schedule and his heavy load of responsibilities, he’s exempt from reporting to this committee.

Ms Blakeman: No, he isn’t.

Mr. Chase: Oh, he’s not?

Mr. Dunn: No. He appeared here last year.

Mr. Chase: Oh, okay. My misunderstanding. I was just wondering if the Premier did appear before the committee.

Mr. Dunn: Yes. In his role as the Minister of Executive Council he appears.

Did you have a question?

The Chair: No. I was just facilitating for Mr. Chase.

Mr. Dunn: What we try to do is help you be effective because it’s this committee that can help cause change. It’s your questions as to: “What was done with those resources that were given? Why wasn’t this achieved?” Your questions around variances, et cetera, can help prompt change. The ministries, though, can also go through change, and we’ve just seen that restructuring that’s taken place this fall. What we do is we make sure that there’s continuity to the issues. By

way of examples, if programs get transferred – AISH has been transferred from HR and E over to Seniors and Community Supports – we follow the program or bring continuity to that. We also had PDDs, that were formerly under Community Development, that are now under Seniors and Community Supports. So we follow those matters, and we make sure that the programs continue to remain effective as they move across.

We’re here to provide help, whether you like to call the word a coach, and certainly we are here as a witness for you. We’re your eyes and ears as we go out into the ministries, and we help in interpreting responses that are being given to the questions that you provide. So I am not a member of the committee, but I certainly believe that I am here to support you in your role as committee members. If we find that we do not believe that a certain response to your question is accurate, we will follow up with that respondent in our next audit, and we ask them to amend their response. It’ll often be provided in writing through the clerk if we do not believe that the response was complete or accurate.

9:40

What we’ve got in this very brief tool kit are frequently asked questions of us, and I’d say that quite often it’s the media, who are struggling with: “Why don’t certain other matters happen? Why is it that the federal government has this problem?” It comes down to that maybe it’s the scope, whereas we don’t have a scope limitation. “Why don’t they have a major issue around that area?” It’s because we’ve already reported on it in the past, and the government is implementing it.

We’ve also provided within this handout material that we gave last year, and I don’t believe it was used as effectively as I like to think this committee could use it. If you look behind the frequently asked questions, we have laid out in here examples of questions Public Accounts members could ask government managers. Remember that at the end of the day you’re here to get through the minister not just the political response. You’re here to get through the minister: “What is government going to do about it? If we want to make a certain improvement, what are you going to do? What changes are you going to make?”

So you’ll see that these are broken out in various sections. Mr. Chase, it starts out with ethical standards. The first question around those is: how do you ensure that ethics are adhered to in your department or ministry?

Similar to the private sector, the next series of questions deals with risk management. What are the greatest risks? What will stop you from achieving your business plan? Why can you not get better value for the money?

The next one then, which is also an important area that you see today, is around internal controls. How do you know, when you run your operation, your business, that the information that you receive is reliable? How do you know that there are no leakages within your systems and processing?

We also talk on value for money and then the annual performance report. As I mentioned, Alberta again has been unique by adopting performance reporting much earlier than any other jurisdictions. The media will start to catch up with this a bit. The federal government is trying now to adopt performance reporting, which Alberta has had experience with over the last decade.

So you want to ask questions around performance reporting, which is your nonfinancial information. They will report certain targets and expectations that they expect to be achieved, and they might get that information by way of surveys and respond in that way. You’ll want to ask questions around: how do you know that that information that you’ve received responds appropriately to that

target? In the past we challenged one on postsecondary affordability, where the question was asked to parents of all children in schools from K all the way through to the universities: do you believe that the school system is affordable? Well, it's quite a broad question to ask all the different segments, and we challenged around whether or not that survey result was the most appropriate way to find out if Alberta's education is affordable, and they have changed the way in which they are now trying to measure that outcome.

Then, also, we have questions here that you could ask around the Auditor General's recommendations.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Dunn, beyond describing inefficiencies and suggesting alternate methods of going about conducting business on a more efficient scale, does the Auditor General's department or our committee have any ability to compel the government to correct a mistake? Is it strictly a suggestive role, or is there actually a degree of compulsion in your department or within this committee as a whole?

Mr. Dunn: Well, you used the term "mistake." Certainly, if it is an out-and-out error in financial reporting, yes, our office would say that we will not render an unqualified opinion on the financial report. But if the insinuation is that there is an alternate way of doing something, then I think it's through your questions in the department that you might challenge them: have you thought of this other way of trying to conduct the business such that you will improve on your performance? I wouldn't say that that's necessarily a mistake. It may be an alternate way of delivering the service.

Mr. Chase: Can your department actually cause change to happen? For example, with the federal government and the current Adscam, the Gomery inquiry, et cetera, there seem to be greater tools or an ability to cause change to occur.

Mr. Dunn: We do cause change to occur. One which had some heightened media last time was on the accountability on certain contracts, what I might call consulting contracts, that came out of the health group. You remember that it got a lot of media attention. It's called the Charlebois situation. We went through all the ministries looking for those sorts this year, and so is the internal auditor looking at it. So, yes, there's been a heightened awareness around that whole area. Yes, it does cause change.

Your questions do have an impact and have an important role to play in asking the department to make sure that they can meet the requirements that you might believe should be adhered to. You might challenge them as to whether the targets are high enough. If it's only 70 per cent, why not 80 or 90 per cent? There has been a challenge in the past by certain members of this committee.

Some members may submit their questions in writing. The point that I would make is that the purpose of this committee is not to embarrass the minister. You're not here to put the minister on the hot seat. Alberta is unique in having the minister even there. It's not to make the minister embarrassed. The point is to get through the minister to the department, the people who have been there for years running the business, that they can become more effective. So whether you submit your questions in writing in advance so they're prepared for them – I'd like to think that you'd have a prepared response, but you always ask a supplemental anyways. So submitting the questions in advance or listening to other committee members' questions and building on that theme is the way in which you probably want to consider your actions in the future.

We also have provided within this tool kit something which is from the CCAF group, which is now also conducting a study on the effective roles of the Public Accounts Committee.

The reporting principles: we've given you the executive summary on that. The point of my mentioning this is that Alberta is following these and has been following them for the last decade. Other governments are getting a lot of press because they are getting awards for finally doing this, but your government has already been doing this for a decade.

Advice for effectiveness; preparation for the meeting. I know you're busy. You mentioned today about travel, et cetera. I certainly feel that you have to read the ministry's annual report. You can also look in prior annual reports, and you've got to try to understand what was achieved for the resources consumed. Remember, your role is to see if value for money was achieved. The private-sector audit committees are focusing on risk and systems to mitigate risk. That's why we've given you some questions around internal control. A comment to you: just be skeptical. Certainly what we ask of our auditors is to be skeptical. How do you know that that's being achieved? What is your source of information?

Involve management in answering the questions. Probably one of the weaknesses that I've noticed in the conduct of this committee in the past is that they have been satisfied with directing a question at the minister and receiving the minister's response. Management will quite often sit there and not provide much input. I've seen some where management has virtually given no input whatsoever. I think back, for those who've had some experience here, to Gaming, where I don't believe there was more than one sentence given by the senior management in response to questions.

Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. With your permission, Mr. Dunn, I actually am looking for clarification from either the clerk or from the chairperson. My understanding was that we were limited to questioning the minister. If the minister passed on the question, that was preferable, but we could not direct questions to the management that was appearing before us. We had to go through the minister. We had that episode many years ago where Gary Mar left the Chamber. I was stuck because he had walked out to make a telephone call, and I couldn't ask a question. So where are we here? Can we go directly to the management, as he is suggesting?

The Chair: That's not my interpretation. You're absolutely right; we were stuck.

Ms Blakeman: Well, let's open it up.

Mr. Dunn: Yeah. My point is: through the minister. You can direct the minister, by way of your question, to involve management in the response.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: If I could clarify that further. One of the previous auditors general, I think, going back two appointments ago to Mr. Donald Salmon – I believe that in his 1992-93 annual report he recommended that it would not be necessary for the ministers to attend Public Accounts meetings. Deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers could certainly answer questions because they are the ones that are administering the day-to-day activities and the programs and policies of the department.

9:50

It has been the past habit of this chair of the committee – and I can only recall one day last spring. Weather conditions were very, very poor, traffic was congested on 98th Avenue, and the minister was

late through no fault of the minister. It was weather conditions and was no reflection on this committee, but we carried on with the meeting, and no one seemed to mind. We have done this on a couple of occasions when the minister also had to leave at 9:45, and the department officials were left to answer any other questions that members may have had. So it is evolving, and hopefully it would evolve to the point where, in my view, direct questions to department officials would be quite acceptable.

Rev. Abbott: Just one comment. You had mentioned earlier, Mr. Chair, that we're not here to set policy, so I think it's important that we do stick with the current policy, which is that the minister is the final authority, and that's where the buck stops as far as this current government goes. So I agree with Mr. Dunn that we should be asking all of our questions through the minister if at all possible.

Mr. Dunn: But involving management in the response.

Rev. Abbott: Right.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dunn: Most of the questions you should have a feel for from what we've provided for you for your thoughts. Of course, you will make up your own questions as you go through the different ministries.

Changes that could affect you in the future. Coming back to your earlier discussions, our reporting is changing. In the past we've reported only annually, and that's the annual report, which contains all the different departments and ministries. But we're also now starting to report in addition to that, and the biggest example from last year is the BSE report, which we reported at the end of July. So the question will have to come to this committee in your organization. How are you going to handle the BSE report? There is a series of recommendations in there, and I would expect that that report should also come forward to this committee when you meet with the minister of agriculture. That's a fairly simple one to deal with: you would also incorporate that report in your inquiry when you meet with the minister of agriculture.

In addition, we're going to be bringing forward another report on seniors' care. It's received a bit of exposure in the media. This seniors' care will involve, obviously, the ministry of seniors. We've met with the new minister of seniors – so we're not trying to catch anybody off guard – and the minister of health. So that report, when tabled, should be produced publicly, and you'll receive it approximately in the middle of May. That report will then also stand before this committee.

So this committee in your organization is going to have to be able to handle multiminsty types of reports which will be outside of our annual report. And if you were ever to engage in discussion around the findings and the recommendations of that report, you would probably need both ministers and representatives from their offices in attendance at that committee meeting.

So I leave that through you, Mr. Chairman, and maybe the vice-chair. In organizing the attendance in the future, you'll want to look at these other reports that will be coming out of our office that will be outside of just the annual report.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Dunn, you mentioned the BSE report and the importance of bringing it up to the minister of agriculture. Unfortunately, that minister doesn't appear to be on our list, and that sort of goes back to almost the beginning of our meeting. Given this BSE crisis and the millions of dollars that are being lost to Alberta

ranchers and transportation, et cetera, do you think it would be wise to approach the minister of agriculture and, potentially, extend our meetings to have that minister come before the Public Accounts Committee?

Mr. Dunn: Well, I'm going to leave that to the chair and the vice-chair in the organization of your committee and your performance there.

Other ones that will come through within our annual report, if you've had a chance to flip through it, are other sections that we've called topics, and one that deals with, because we want to try to catch topics as they were of interest to the public, the P3. So we have quite an extensive review of the P3. That one was addressed to both the ministers of infrastructure and transportation at that time – now that those have been combined, you have the one ministry – and also the Department of Finance. When you look at that one, when you have the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, which is on your list, you may want to also consider including someone from Alberta Finance, a very senior financial official there, to talk about the accounting around the P3.

When we wrote that section, it was to try to anticipate the types of questions that you might be interested in, not to try to take a position on whether it is good or bad but to provide you with a thoughtful piece that explains the pros, the cons, the considerations that should be looked at for alternate capital financing.

Mr. Oberle: I'm just wondering: have you produced a stand-alone primer, if you will, on your views on P3s, or do you just comment on individual P3 projects within annual reports?

Mr. Dunn: In this annual report it talks about the whole consideration of P3s and then looks at the two that were under consideration at that time, the Calgary courthouse and the south Edmonton ring road. So the primer is the front part of it, in which we try to demystify what is really a P3 versus what are alternate construction processes. It's in here. It's about a 25-page section.

The Chair: Mr. Dunn, there's an additional question down here, please.

Mr. Hinman: Not being appointed to the committee, but a question for it: does this committee have no power or authority to bring in a minister like the agriculture minister and be able to ask questions of him? Basically, once it's over, you mentioned earlier, or someone did, that you can't ask about last year's report. So, theoretically, they can line up the ministers and reports that come out, and we have no access to ask them questions. Is that correct?

Mr. Dunn: Well, I'm going to leave that to the chair and the vice-chair because they're the ones who have organized the program.

The Chair: Well, certainly there have been members of this committee in the last 10 minutes that have contacted me, and they would like the agriculture minister to appear before this committee. This list that was circulated earlier – you've got to be aware that we only saw 10 ministries out of the 24 last year, so the criteria was: let's bring the ones that we had not seen so that if we're not going to meet, we can at least have them before the Public Accounts Committee at least every second year.

There has been interest expressed. The minister of agriculture was here last year. The chair will endeavour to ensure that if there's a fall session, we know the dates. We will contact the Hon. Doug Horner and try to make arrangements to get him here.

Yes, George.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chair, I will work with you to move towards getting that done this fall.

But I do think that we need to recognize that comments around this table are by members of the Public Accounts Committee; right?

The Chair: No.

Mr. VanderBurg: Is this open to everybody?

The Chair: This is certainly open to every Member of the Legislative Assembly, but only committee members can vote on procedures. That is the rule not only in this committee but all legislative committees of the Assembly.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thanks for that clarification.

Mr. Dunn: So the conclusions you can read; you see them in there on the slide there. I think we were making some improvements last year. I hope those who are continuing on feel the same.

Next week we will introduce our 2004 annual report. We're going to respond to any of your questions. I ask you to focus on the key recommendations, and those are summarized on page 4. They're also highlighted in yellow throughout the report.

10:00

I also want to mention to you that CCAF, which you've heard about in the past, is doing a research project on updating best practices for public accounts committees. This research team – and a member of my office is assisting it – would like to meet with representatives of this committee around the conduct of the Public Accounts in Alberta: what works well, and what can we look at for improvements?

The chair did meet with that research person last year. You might remember, Mr. Chairman, that you met in my office with the research team. The clerk did respond to the survey that was sent out to all Public Accounts in Canada, and the preliminary results were expressed to the members in attendance at the August CCPAC meeting in Fredericton. The intention is to compile best practices across Canada – and you'd like to think that Alberta's voice would be heard – and that people can learn from each other. So they're completing the second half of their research, and the expectation is

that that will be available for the August meeting in Niagara-on-the-Lake, that the chair has just mentioned. So I would expect that you and the vice-chair could look through as to who and when might be the best time that you might be able to meet with the representatives from that research group.

Okay? I appreciate that I rushed at the end, but thank you all for your questions and your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dunn. We will look forward to your visit next week. Hopefully, we can have some questions for you in regard to your annual report.

Dr. Morton: That annual report is in the box of materials that we've already received?

The Chair: Yes, for 2003-04. Also, it might be advantageous to bring along the consolidated financial statements as well.

Mr. Hinman: Are there any extra reports that I would have access to and be able to get?

Mrs. Dacyshyn: I'll talk to you.

The Chair: Yes, we'll look after that, hopefully.

Item 8 on the agenda, Other Business. At this time seeing none, I would remind hon. members that we are meeting again on March 16, next Wednesday, and we will have, of course, Mr. Dunn here.

The chair would like to say that if you have any questions, just let myself or the vice-chair know. If you have any suggestions on how to run these meetings more smoothly or more efficiently, please feel free to contact us.

I would like to thank you for your time and your patience this morning. If there are no other questions at this time, a motion for adjournment, please.

Rev. Abbott: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will see you next Wednesday morning.

[The committee adjourned at 10:03 a.m.]