



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Tuesday, December 5, 2023
9:30 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP), Chair
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC), Deputy Chair

Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)

Also in Attendance

Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)

Office of the Auditor General Participants

W. Doug Wylie Auditor General

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Christina Williamson	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Shannon Parke	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schweigel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Tuesday, December 5, 2023

[Ms Pancholi in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. Good morning. I'd like to call this meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance today.

My name is Rakhi Pancholi. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud and chair of this committee. As we begin, I'd like to invite members, guests, and LAO staff at the table to introduce themselves, and I'll start to my right.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Ms de Jonge: Chantelle de Jonge, MLA, Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. Lundy: Brandon Lundy, Leduc-Beaumont.

Mrs. Johnson: Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Ms Ganley: Kathleen Ganley, Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Bhurgri: Abdul Aziz Bhurgri, research officer.

Dr. Williamson: Christina Williamson, research officer.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now ask those joining via teleconference and videoconference to introduce themselves as I call your names.

MLA Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. MLA Jackie Lovely, Camrose constituency.

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Hi. Good morning, everyone. Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

The Chair: Thank you.

I note another member has just joined at the table. I'll ask him to introduce himself.

Mr. McDougall: Myles McDougall, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: Thank you.

I don't believe there are any substitutions noted for today.

We have a few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating by videoconference are encouraged to please turn on your camera while speaking and to mute your microphone when not speaking. Members participating virtually who wish to be placed on a speakers list are asked to message the committee clerk, and those in the room should signal the chair or

the committee clerk. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

I do want to note that another member has joined, so I'll ask him to introduce himself.

Mr. Haji: Sharif Haji, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

A draft agenda for today's meeting was made available to all members. Does anyone have any changes or additions to the draft agenda?

If not, would someone like to move a motion to approve the agenda? I see MLA Haji.

Mr. Haji: I move the motion to approve the agenda.

The Chair: Does he need to read that?

Mr. Huffman: It doesn't matter.

The Chair: I think it's pretty standard that we're moving the agenda. Okay.

Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? Okay. Thank you. On videoconference, all in favour? Thank you. That motion is carried.

The minutes from our last meeting, from November 21, were posted on the committee's internal website. Do members have any errors or omissions to note from those minutes?

Seeing none, would anybody like to move a motion to approve the minutes? Thank you, MLA Rowswell. So moved by MLA Rowswell. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour in the room? Any opposed? Via videoconference, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

Hon. members, the subcommittee on committee business met on November 23 and 30 to discuss and make recommendations for a list of ministries and their related agencies, boards, and commissions that the committee may want to call to appear to respond to questions related to their annual reports and reports of the Auditor General. The subcommittee has also proposed caucus speaking time allotments that the committee may want to adopt. The report on those recommendations is made available to the committee on the internal website. I would note that these are just recommendations coming from the subcommittee, and the committee may move motions based on these recommendations in whole or in part, or it may make another decision altogether. However, it would be best that the decision on these items be made today so we can move forward.

Let's begin with the schedule and invitees. Again, that was part of the subcommittee report that was available on the internal website. While in discussion about setting a schedule of ministries to invite, the subcommittee determined that in order to provide ministries as much time to prepare as possible, the committee should look to schedule the first business meetings at the end of January. The other ministries could be scheduled on Tuesday mornings during session. The subcommittee has recommended that we should consider inviting 10 ministries right now, which should take us through to the end of the spring sitting, and then we can look at inviting more ministries later on in anticipation of next year's fall sitting.

I do want to make a note that we don't yet have the session calendar for the spring session, so the 10 ministries that, you know, we've put forward: we're not certain that we'll get through all of them, or we may get through all of them and may be able to invite more. We thought 10 was a fair number to begin with in terms of

an order, and then we might be able to clarify more once we get the spring sitting calendar.

Does the committee have any comments or questions on what was discussed at the subcommittee and the report that was provided to the committee? No? Okay.

The subcommittee report has made a recommendation on the order of the first 10 ministries that could appear before the committee, which can be displayed on the screens, I think. Yes. I would now welcome some discussion about creating a schedule and then a motion to set a schedule. This is, again, the order of the ministries that we have recommended from the subcommittee. Is there any discussion, or would anybody like to move this motion? I see MLA Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: I'll move the motion.

The Chair: Okay. Do you want to read it into the record, please?

Mr. Schmidt: I move that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts invite the following ministries and agencies, boards, and commissions to appear before the committee to respond to questions regarding the relevant ministry annual reports and the reports of the Auditor General: one, Health and Alberta Health Services; two, Energy and Minerals with the Alberta Energy Regulator; three, Environment and Protected Areas; four, Education; five, Seniors, Community and Social Services; six, Treasury Board and Finance; seven, Mental Health and Addiction; eight, Public Safety and Emergency Services; nine, Affordability and Utilities; and 10, Children and Family Services.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Schmidt.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Okay. Seeing none, I will call the question on the motion. All in favour in the room? Any opposed? I'll go to the videoconference now. All in favour of the motion? Any opposed? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

With that decided, the date for the out-of-session meeting, as discussed, will be decided shortly, and notice will be distributed. We are anticipating that we would like to call at least, I think, one ministry we've talked about before we return to session in February, simply just to get going on some of the work of this committee. It's been a while since we've met.

The practice of this committee has been to meet on Tuesday mornings during session. Therefore, the dates for subsequent meetings will be set once the 2024 sessional calendar has been issued in mid-January 2024, so we will finalize that as we go forward.

Okay. Speaking time allotments. Again, this was available as part of the subcommittee report. The committee should decide on a time allotment for speaking rotations when the committee conducts a business meeting with ministries. The subcommittee on committee business has recommended the same time allotments used by this committee in the last Legislature for a one-and-a-half-hour meeting and for a two-hour meeting, one format for when the Assembly has a morning sitting and one when there is no morning Assembly sitting. The subcommittee has also recommended a time allotment in the event of a three-hour meeting. I'm sure everybody is looking forward to three-hour meetings.

These allotment charts allow for opening remarks by the ministry staff and the Auditor General, and then they set out speaking time blocks which rotate between the Official Opposition caucus and the government caucus. In all cases the proposed allotments end with three minutes for each caucus to read questions into the record for a written response and to allow time for any other business of the committee.

Is there any discussion on the proposed rotations? Again, they are part of the subcommittee report. This is all going swimmingly.

Mr. Schmidt: Can we put those up on the screen just to refresh our memories?

The Chair: Sure. Absolutely. I believe this first one is for the hour-and-a-half meeting block. This is when we are having a morning sitting.

Any questions on that? So the Official Opposition and the government begin with a 10-minute block each. Actually, two rotations of 10-minute blocks, and then we move into five-minute blocks back and forth.

MLA Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Yeah. Sorry. I just had a question, probably for the clerks. Is the speaking rotation – like, has it historically been constant, or does it vary with the composition of the Legislature?

Mr. Huffman: These rotations were accepted pretty early on in the last Legislature. I don't know if they were right at the start or if they were maybe in the Second Session, but they were accepted and used for most of the last Legislature.

9:40

Ms Robert: And halfway through the prior Legislature.

Mr. Huffman: And halfway through the prior Legislature as well, I'm learning. It sounds like they've been pretty consistent.

Ms Ganley: Thanks.

The Chair: MLA Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry. Can you confirm that the second rotation is 10-minute blocks and then the third rotation is five-minute blocks? That doesn't really ring – I don't know. That doesn't seem to . . .

The Chair: Ms Robert.

Ms Robert: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think that if we look at a two-hour meeting rotation with morning sittings, that's probably what you're more used to. I think the 1.5-hour one is sort of a legacy time allotment. We've had it approved for a while, but I would think that what you're used to from the last Legislature would have been something like this. Does that look more familiar?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. That looks more familiar.

Thank you.

The Chair: And, of course, note that the rotations continue until we run out of time, right? If for some reason a rotation ended early, you would go back to a nine-minute block until you run out of time to get to the three minutes at the end for each caucus to read questions into the record, just in the event somebody cuts their rotation short. What we're seeing on the screen now is for the two-hour meeting with a morning sitting as well. Yeah.

And then the last one which we created – oh, sorry. That's the two-hour meeting without a morning sitting. This is probably the one, having sat on this committee before, that we did the most, actually, I'd say.

Then we created a three-hour rotation as well, which was just adding an extra block.

Mr. Schmidt: I see that we have a three-hour hypothetical rotation. Under what circumstances would the committee consider holding a three-hour meeting?

The Chair: I think it was anticipated that if there was any possibility where it was going to be complex or we are having more agencies or we're having, you know, a ministry and an agency, that was a possibility. That would actually be for discussion.

Mr. Rowswell: I don't see that happening in session. It's more maybe an out-of-session one, where we're adding a board or agency or something like that.

Mr. Schmidt: Will that be set, like, when we come up with the schedule, then?

The Chair: Correct. When the chair calls the scheduling, yeah, that will be when that will be set.

Mr. Rowswell: It's just there in case we need it.

The Chair: Any other discussion on the rotations? Yes, MLA Lundy.

Mr. Lundy: Sorry. Just for clarification: the duration of any meeting will be determined through the subcommittee process. Is that correct?

The Chair: The meeting dates will be set by the chair but, yes, through the subcommittee process. Is that correct? Yeah.

Mr. Schmidt: No eight-hour rotation?

The Chair: MLA Schmidt, if you'd like to propose that we consider eight-hour meetings, I'm sure we'll have some spirited debate about that.

Now, we don't technically need a motion to approve the rotations, I understand. It's just sort of that we agree as a committee that this is the process. I should note that we will also – as I see, we've got an independent member. Where an independent member is attending, we would then ask for notice ahead of time to the committee that the independent member is attending, and we would adjust the rotations appropriately for that upcoming meeting.

Mr. Schmidt: What has been the past practice? We haven't had an independent member attend a meeting in the last session.

The Chair: I think we did, if I recall, a couple of times. I'll have to defer to Warren. Do you remember what happened last time?

Mr. Huffman: Yes. When an independent member showed up to a PAC meeting, there was agreement amongst the members at the start of the meeting to cede, I think, like, three minutes or something, at the final round of questions, to the independent member. I'm not sure if it was three minutes exactly, but whatever the time was, the agreement of the committee was to cede to the independent member.

Mr. Schmidt: So it was decided at the meeting that the independent member attended?

The Chair: I believe it was decided ahead of time because the independent member indicated they would be attending. And that's what we would ask, that there is some notice given to the committee so that the members can agree ahead of time as to what the rotation will be.

Any other discussion?

Are there any objections to adopting these time allocations and these speaking rotations? No? Okay. I think, just by consensus, because we don't need to pass a motion, we're going to agree to this again. We're acknowledging, given the ministries that might be appearing and the members that might be appearing, that we would determine which is the appropriate rotation to use. So that's how we will proceed.

We're on to other business already. Are there any other items for discussion under other business? No? Okay. Well, that was fairly easy.

The date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair, and we'll proceed from there.

If there's nothing else for consideration under the business of the meeting – obviously, as we discussed last time, we'll move shortly into the orientation sessions – would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? MLA Ganley. All in favour in the room? Any opposed? Online, all in favour? Any opposed? Okay. Thank you.

That motion is carried. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:46 a.m.]

