



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Select Special
Public Health Act
Review Committee

Tuesday, July 28, 2020
5 p.m.

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Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

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[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Chair: Thank you, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order. Welcome to members and staff in attendance for this meeting of the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee.

My name is Nicholas Milliken. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Currie and the chair of this committee. I'm going to ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then once we go around the table, I'll look to anyone on either video or teleconference. We can start on my right.

Ms Rosin: Okay. Miranda Rosin, MLA, Banff-Kananaskis, and deputy chair.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Nathan Neudorf, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Turton: Searle Turton, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Reid: Roger Reid, Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Hoffman: Sarah Hoffman, Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Shepherd: Good evening. David Shepherd, Edmonton-City Centre.

Ms Sorensen: Good evening. Rhonda Sorensen, manager of corporate communications with the LAO.

Dr. Massolin: Hello. Philip Massolin, clerk of committees and research services.

Mr. Roth: Hello. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

The Chair: I believe that we have Member Gray on video conference, and we have Member Lovely on teleconference.

Ms Lovely: Hello there.

The Chair: Perfect.

All right. Based on the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health regarding physical distancing, attendees at today's meeting are reminded to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, so there's no need for you to turn them on and off manually. Committee proceedings are of course being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and any other devices that you have to mute in order to not interrupt the meeting. I'm double-checking mine, and I'm clear.

Moving on to the agenda, approval of the agenda is the next item of business. Our next one this afternoon or evening, as we have heard from several of the members, is to approve the agenda. Does anyone have any changes to make? If not, would a member please move a motion to approve our agenda? As a possible motion it could be that the agenda for the July 28, 2020, meeting of the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee be adopted as distributed. Do I have any hon. members? I see the hon. Member Turton.

Mr. Turton: Yes.

The Chair: Yes. All right.

On the motion as proposed by the hon. Member Turton to approve the agenda, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

All right. Item 3. Next up we have the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. Draft minutes were posted for your consideration and for the consideration of all committee members. Are there any errors or omissions to note, and if not, would a member please move a motion to approve the minutes? I don't believe that there are any errors or omissions. I see Member Hoffman to move a motion. A draft motion could be moved by Member Hoffman that the minutes for the July 17, 2020, meeting of the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee be adopted as distributed. Is that . . .

Ms Hoffman: I was going to say "as directed." No, I'm just kidding; it's perfect. Yeah.

The Chair: Perfect.

All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

All right. Item 4. Before we proceed with our discussions, I would like to take a quick moment to acknowledge the ongoing technical support available from the Ministry of Health and to note for the record that the ministry has provided a written follow-up to the questions that were raised at the July 17, 2020, committee meeting, and this information has been provided to committee members.

Item 4(a). The committee has invited written submissions from the public as part of our review of the Public Health Act. As members will recall, when the last meeting ended, a motion was on the floor; therefore, debate was adjourned. For the purposes of all members here and for *Hansard* as well, I will read this motion into the record again, and then I will open the floor up for discussion. Moved by Ms Gray that

the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee authorize communications services of the Legislative Assembly Office to solicit submissions from members of the public through the no-cost and low-cost options presented by communications services at this time.

Are there any further discussions to have with regard to this? I see Member Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I would speak in favour of this motion. Again, in my opportunities to have participated in a few different reviews of different pieces of legislation, this is not an uncommon approach to take. Certainly, it is a fairly minimal cost, being at most \$1,000 for social media advertising and \$500 to \$1,000 for Google Ads campaigns, so it amounted to about \$2,000. I think that's a reasonable outlay to ensure that Albertans are aware of this review, have the opportunity to contribute their thoughts. I would suggest that we vote in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to discuss this motion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question. On the motion as proposed by the hon. member Ms Gray, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried.

Moving on to item 5, other business. I would not presuppose anything, but I do believe that perhaps there is some further business. Do I see anyone? I see Member Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity under other business to just quickly bring to the floor one other motion that we had put forward from our caucus, I believe in the name of Ms Gray, that being regarding that early on in this process, as we were beginning and preparing, I believe, at the subcommittee and then we may have also afterwards, when that subcommittee report came to the main committee here, mentioned our interest in possibly pursuing public hearings as part of this work.

We did put forward a motion for consideration. Oh, pardon me. I guess it was in my name, Mr. Chair. My apologies. I can't keep track of everything I'm doing these days. Essentially, that motion – I believe you have it there. Should I read through it or . . .

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay.

The motion, then, moved by myself that

the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee request that the Legislative Assembly Office prepare, for the Committee's consideration at its next meeting, an estimate of the costs associated with holding one-day public hearings in each of the following locations during, and for the purposes of, the review:

- (a) High River,
- (b) Brooks,
- (c) Medicine Hat,
- (d) Calgary,
- (e) Red Deer,
- (f) Edmonton, and
- (g) Grande Prairie.

Again, as we had stated previously, Mr. Chair, of course, to the government members, we've made it quite clear that we feel there needs to be broader consultation with this and that we do need to indeed hear from Albertans who have been directly affected by many of the decisions made under the Public Health Act in order to properly understand how the implementation of the powers of that act indeed work out on the ground as part of our review to determine, then, if there are any changes that need to be made in that act.

Now, of course, I know that on most of those fronts members of the government have disagreed and felt that was beyond the scope of what they wished to pursue in their work on this committee. However, I did want to put this forward again as we had prepared it as part of our support for those broader consultations and those opportunities in areas that were particularly affected by this most recent use of the powers of the Public Health Act.

Indeed, I would note that the committee is not committing to any particular action if they support this motion. We are not committing to actually travelling to these places. We are merely asking the LAO to provide an estimate of the costs to do so. Should government members at that time feel that those costs are prohibitive or inappropriate, then certainly they would have some concrete proof from which to make that argument, and at that point I think the decision would be made and the matter would be dropped. It would be my hope that government members would at least allow us to entertain the opportunity to obtain that information and be able to make a clear decision based on knowing all of the facts.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to this motion? I see Member Reid.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for putting forth the idea. I guess my concern or my piece is just related to the direction of the chief medical officer of health in terms of being mindful of potential risks for us. I think at this point I don't feel we're in the right place to do public consultations in light of COVID-19, so at this point I would discourage us using the resources of the LAO to do something that I don't think is in the best interest of public safety at this point.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see Member Hoffman.

5:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I feel really lucky to be here tonight with the representative for High River. Am I right, Member Reid? Yeah. I think visiting your riding or at least costing what the impacts would be and putting forward a consideration for it with more information would be useful. You come here every week, and I think it would be appropriate for us to have the opportunity to engage with the folks that you represent in your riding. So welcome to Edmonton, almost Glenora. I think it would be appropriate for us to have the opportunity to visit some of these other key areas, specifically the areas where each of the zone medical health leads is from as well as where the major outbreaks were in the province. I think at least having the information to be able to make the decision would be fair and appropriate.

I also am excited to be here with Member Neudorf, who just completed, I want to say, at least 80 meetings.

Mr. Neudorf: Seventy-two.

Ms Hoffman: Seventy-two meetings – let's correct the record; my apologies – in a number of communities throughout the province. I want to say that I was able to participate in some of those, and I think that the public officials who supported those did so in a way that ensured everyone's sense of safety and comfort. There were masks when people entered. They were timed so that rather than having everyone for one big public meeting, they were smaller meetings with, you know, somewhere between three and sort of 10 guests, the few that I went to. Probably not even 10; I'd say there were probably six in the largest one I went to at a time coming to present. I think there are ways that this can be done, and I think that there is nothing probably more important than being able to hear from the public when it comes to public health, so for those reasons I think it would be fair for us to approve the motion that we are considering here today, which is about us considering it and gathering the information to be able to make an informed decision.

I think that definitely from the fact that we have MLAs here from these communities around the province and they're able to travel in this direction, I don't think there's any reason why we shouldn't be able to get feedback in the other direction. Also, the fact that Member Neudorf held so many safe meetings, from my experience, throughout the province: I expect we have the same capabilities within the LAO as were demonstrated through the Department of Education. For those reasons I'll be supporting this.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate or comment?

Seeing none, on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member Shepherd, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That is defeated.

Moving on, I believe that there has been notice of another motion that was appropriately given as well.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. I'd be happy to read that.

The Chair: Sure. Member Hoffman.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I don't recall whose name was on it originally.

The Chair: I believe yours was.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, bonus. This is with regard to research support from the LAO, so I want to put forward a motion for consideration that is worded as follows, that we move that

the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee direct committee research services to prepare the following for the committee's review at a subsequent meeting:

- (a) a written summary of the powers and duties of the chief medical officer of health under the Public Health Act, and
- (b) a crossjurisdictional review of the powers and duties of the equivalent role established under legislation by each of the other provinces.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Would you like to take the opportunity to comment?

Ms Hoffman: Sure. I think a lot of folks have probably been engaging in some of their own research in this regard, seeing of course different chief medical officers of health from across the country speaking in different ways, and I think it relates directly to the legislation that we're reviewing. It's in the first third. I don't have the section in front of me. Sorry. But definitely the role of the chief medical officer of health directly relates to our mandate, so I

think it would be fair and responsible for us to consider how the legislation in Alberta aligns with legislation and regulations in other jurisdictions. Receiving that information from research services will ensure that it's done to the standard that we all expect, that it was done consistently, and that we'll be able to take that information into consideration as we move forward.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other – I see hon. Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree that this motion sets out reasonable and very pertinent information regarding the Public Health Act, which we are reviewing, and I would encourage all my colleagues to support this motion as well.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join? Okay.

On the motion as proposed by the hon. Member Hoffman, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That is carried.

Any other business?

Moving on to agenda item 6. The next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

If there is nothing else for the committee's consideration today, I'll call for a motion to adjourn. I see the hon. Member Long with a proposed motion that the July 28, 2020, meeting of the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee be adjourned. All those in favour of the motion as proposed by Member Long, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

We are adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

