

[Chairman: Mr. Pashak]

[8:30 a.m.]

MR. PASHAK: Good morning everybody. I'd like to call this first meeting of the Second Session to order. I anticipate that this will be just a brief organizational meeting. We have the Auditor General, Mr. Salmon, with us again and his associate Mr. Wingate. For those of you who are new to the committee - I see one new face, Mrs. Osterman.

MRS. OSTERMAN: I'm being recycled, Mr. Chairman. It's the in thing to do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I see. Well, welcome to the committee. I've distributed an agenda. I'll give you a minute to look it over if you haven't already done so. Is there any discussion of the agenda or any additions, omissions, or whatever?

MR. MOORE: I move we approve the agenda and operate by it today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Is there any discussion on Mr. Moore's motion? Hearing none, are you then ready for the question? Those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed.

Some opening remarks by the chairman are indicated. Just in terms of legislative authority, I think I pointed out last year that to a degree this committee operates under our Standing Orders and the chairman has the same powers as the Speaker, but I am bound by the decisions this committee itself makes and by whatever motions that you introduce and are accepted by the membership of the committee. The only real authority I exercise during the meeting, other than insisting, I guess, that the rules of procedure are followed, is that I establish a speakers' list. I usually do that by recognizing the hands of members, and then each member, at least traditionally, has been allowed one question and two supplementals. I basically just prepare a speakers' list and go through in that order. I don't know if we're going to adopt the same rules this time or not, but we'll see.

We don't prepare a final report in this committee, and from time to time I've suggested some committee reform. Some of those suggestions are in a Bill that I presented to this Legislature.

Is there any question on what I've just said in terms of those basic opening remarks?

The second item on the agenda, then, is the Chairman's Report. Did we include in the package a budget? Yes. You'll note that in the package that went out there's a budget for the Public Accounts Committee. There really is no provision in this budget for the committee to meet outside of session. There was not a motion that came forward and was adopted during the last time that would permit us to do that. The budget is substantially higher than it was in previous years. That's because of the changed indemnities for members of the committee and the chairman of the committee, I might add, as well. Are there any questions on the budget, then, as distributed?

The second item under my report is to comment on the fact that we had the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' annual meeting here in Edmonton . . . Oh. Mr. Hawkesworth.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Under item 3(a) there's sub (i). Do you need approval to attend this Symposium on Communicating Audit Information in the Nineties?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, right. I'm sorry; I missed that. Yes, I missed that. There is enough money, by the way, in this budget for me to attend that conference. The annual meeting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, by the way, will be in St. John's, Newfoundland, and normally Mr. Moore, the assistant chairman, and I attend that. That's already provided for. But I've managed to get some seat-sale tickets for myself to go to Newfoundland, so there's actually money in the budget that would permit me to attend a symposium that the Auditor General has planned for Ottawa on May 17 and 18. It has to do with communicating audit information in the nineties, getting the message across. It's a meeting of North American auditors and legislators, and it's on the cost-effective communicating of audit information to Legislatures. So I'm asking the permission of the committee to attend that conference, and of course I would report back to the committee.

Mr. Moore.

MR. MOORE: I move that we approve your attendance on our behalf.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Is there any discussion on that motion? Okay.

MR. PAYNE: If you wish to endure two summer days in Ottawa, Mr. Chairman, I'm more than happy to let you do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are we agreed then?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Okay. Now, for the Organization of Future Meetings. Meetings of the Committee. Is there a motion? Mrs. Black.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I so . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, pardon me. I started the discussion on the conference that we held here in Edmonton last year. I did report on that at the time because that conference was in July. Later on in the agenda you'll see the possibility of forming a subcommittee to study the document Guidelines for Public Accounts Committees in Canada. That's one of the major activities of that CCPAC conference that is held annually. It's to look at the whole question of how an ideal public accounts committee in Canada should operate. We can get into that report or mention that later on.

I'd just like to say that I think it was a successful event. I've received a lot of letters, not just from public accounts people but also from the auditors general across Canada and some from Australia who were pleased with the sessions. All in all, I think everyone felt it was quite a successful event.

I don't know. Mr. Moore, did you have something for the committee?

MR. MOORE: It was a very, very successful event. Alberta came through, as usual, with its hospitality. It showed all the

way through, and the comments afterwards were terrific from outside.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right. Especially people from across the country and from Australia. The delegates from Australia were really quite pleased to have an opportunity to visit Alberta. Not only did we spend some time showing them the attractiveness of Edmonton, but we managed to take a good number of them down to Calgary, where they attended the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, and then the next day we took them for a trip to Banff and Lake Louise. Those who had never been to that part of the world were especially delighted.

Any further questions on that item? Okay. Item 4, then: Organization of Future Meetings, (a) Meetings of the Committee. What's your pleasure? Mrs. Black.

MRS. BLACK: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee meet every Wednesday morning at 8:30 in this Chamber during the session and only during the session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. There's a motion before us that we meet during session at 8:30 every Wednesday morning while we're sitting. Is there any discussion?

Mrs. Laing.

MRS. B. LAING: May I second that motion? Do you need a seconder?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't think we need seconders really, but . . .

Mr. Hawkesworth.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: That portion of the motion that says only during the session - I don't see how that's really going to give the committee the opportunity to question each of the ministers of all the public accounts and deal with all the departments of government. The number of Wednesdays we'd have available to us would only allow us to do a small minority of all the ministers. I guess that decision was taken previously by a former committee, but I still feel that's limiting our mandate too much.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, do we have the opportunity as a committee to make a motion that we choose an additional meeting during the time the House is sitting - for instance, a Wednesday evening or something to that effect - if concern was built up near the end of the session, depending on how much work we'd accomplished? In other words, the motion that has been put by the member does not preclude the opportunity to do that, as I understand it. I just want that clarified.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll have to ask the mover of the motion. Is that within the . . .

MRS. BLACK: I think that would be acceptable, Mr. Chairman. I would have no problem if we found we needed to have additional meetings during session. We could, say, meet on a Wednesday night or something like that if the committee so chose. I think that would have to be left up to the committee at the time in dealing with what we're dealing with. But I think we have to have a scheduled time. I think that's very important, because we all have busy schedules and we have to work in a

time frame each week that we are meeting. If the need arose, certainly I'd have no problem with this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does that clear that up?

MRS. OSTERMAN: That answers my question. I didn't want the opportunity to be precluded, Mr. Chairman, by accepting this motion for us as a committee, that we decide we want an additional meeting or so.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to point out . . . I would take it, then, that the motion means all regular meetings of this committee would be scheduled at 8:30 on Wednesdays during the session and that extraordinary meetings during the session could be called upon, some member making that request and the majority of the committee members agreeing to it.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Precisely. That's what I mean.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I should point out that there's a financial limitation. Even if the members agreed to meet outside committee hours, which is not included in your motion, there's no budgetary provision for that, by the way. But in any event . . .

MS M. LAING: I want to speak to both the motion and the question. I think for people who live out of town, probably a Wednesday evening meeting is quite okay. For those of us who live in Edmonton, our Wednesday evenings are usually filled with other things, other meetings, so for me it would be well nigh impossible to get to Wednesday meetings. I would also suggest that if it was only extraordinary meetings, we would still . . . [interjection] Are you talking to me, Sheldon?

MR. CHUMIR: I was just heckling.

MS M. LAING: To the corner, please.

MR. CHUMIR: We're educating. We want our Wednesday nights off too.

MS M. LAING: In my experience, we saw only about 10 ministers. Many times we had meetings canceled when a minister couldn't show up. I don't think the Wednesday night meetings, even if we could attend, would ever come anywhere near meeting the number of meeting times we need to have, unless we scheduled them on a regular basis of every Wednesday night.

MR. CHUMIR: Well, it seems to me we've got things kind of in reverse in terms of the whole picture. I think the issue should be for us to decide what work is essential, what is credible for a Public Accounts Committee to do during the course of the year in fulfilling our duties, and then just schedule the time to do the work. It seems to me absolutely foolish to have to attempt to jam whatever meetings we're having into a session with all the vagaries, the vagaries which last year resulted in the review of very few departments and very few priority departments and, spectacularly, without having an opportunity to question the Provincial Treasurer, the man who is responsible for all the financial statements, these public accounts. I mean, if members of this committee will search deep into the recesses of their souls, when they look back, the degree of respect they

will have for the institution they're dealing with, the committees they serve on – to think you could have a Public Accounts Committee and never deal with the Provincial Treasurer once in respect of a full year's public accounts is really very shameful. So the issue is how we get the work done. In my view, there is no need to jam it into the session. If we as a committee decide we have work we want to do, then we can and should go back to get whatever budget is needed. I think that's the way to deal with this globally.

Insofar as Wednesday evening is concerned, my heart bleeds for those fellow members who happen to go through the hardship of living here in Edmonton during the session.

AN HON. MEMBER: My heart really bleeds too.

MR. CHUMIR: We from outside town rush right home for our rounds of meetings as well on Wednesday evenings. That's not a particularly good time, but there are other times that could be muscled out. Did I not understand, perhaps, that the meeting was to discuss, not to deal with a . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Through the Chair, please.

MR. CHUMIR: It is through the Chair, but I'm kind of looking at the Chair peripherally through my left eye. Do I have to look at the Chair when I talk to the Chair?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You don't have to look at the Chair when you talk, but if you want to raise a question of another member in the Assembly, you have to address it through the Chair.

MR. CHUMIR: I'd understood the Member for Three Hills' suggestion re a Wednesday night meeting was an isolated meeting to discuss scheduling issues. That was incorrect. But in any event, forget the Wednesday night meeting as the bottom line.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Osterman, to comment on her suggestion.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, that was illustrative of picking a time when we could have additional meetings. It wasn't to discuss a meeting time. Obviously the committee would have to look at their schedules if they wanted an additional number of meetings and choose a time and set it ahead so members could plan around it. I was just thinking of evenings, and Wednesday evening is the only evening that can be shaken free of our legislative duties. So it was just illustrative. It in no way carried any intent to suggest that had to be a time to meet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I may comment from the Chair on Mr. Chumir's comments. Although I may have a certain degree of personal sympathy for the issue he raises, and maybe there is some merit in his suggestion that we should meet outside session, I think I'd have to rule that that whole question is out of order because there simply is not the financing approved by the previous committee that would permit us to do it. I think it's something he may want to take under advisement for giving direction to future committees; that is, to introduce a motion that would permit the committee to meet outside of session.

MR. CHUMIR: We can't propose changes to our budget and seek more supply?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I suppose it's always possible to go back for some sort of supplementary requisition or a special warrant, perhaps. I don't know how government finance operates, not being a member of the government, but we could . . .

MR. CHUMIR: We could apply to Mr. Kowalski for some lottery funds.

MR. SHRAKE: Mr. Chairman, I've sat on this committee a number of years now, and if somebody feels a burning need that there is a department they really want to see, their old budget . . . Remember, this is not money that's going to be spent. This is money that's already spent. We're looking into it. If they felt a burning need, I'm sure they could bring it up during one of our meetings. We'd bring that department up and they would have an opportunity to ask their questions. If that doesn't work, as has been suggested, we have Wednesday evening. There's nothing wrong with us putting in a Monday morning to go through these if they feel there's that need. Or there's Friday afternoon. This Legislature adjourns 1 o'clock; we've got all Friday afternoon.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've got another topic coming up toward the end of this agenda that has to do with scheduling . . .
Sorry.

MR. SHRAKE: [Inaudible] the information off. If we are meeting out of session, then you bring these people from all over the province, there's a pretty heavy cost in that. If it's necessary and if I hear some scintillating questions that can't be answered during this session, of course I would support that we come and sit out of session, but for the last couple of years I really haven't heard that type of question or that type of need.

MR. BRADLEY: Mr. Chairman, I think we should only meet during the session. This year there is a possibility, in fact, that there will be a fall session, so it gives an opportunity in the fall session also to review accounts with ministers. My experience has been that in a two-year cycle we are able to address all the departments before us. That is probably adequate. We should be able to schedule the priority departments which members wish to have discussions about. Being one of the members who have to travel the farthest to get to this committee, I have no problem sitting Monday morning or Friday afternoon or Wednesday evening if we need to schedule other meetings.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I think the whole basis is that we need a set time to meet, because we've got 21 people on this committee, 21 people doing all sorts of things. I think it's very important that we establish today that we meet Wednesday mornings, we meet at 8:30, a straight time, and we know that every Wednesday morning during session we have to be in this Assembly. As far as dealing with questions, I think it really behooves us all to sit down and get away from political speeches in here and start dishing out questions. We'd probably deal with a lot more on a lot quicker basis if we didn't make grandstand speeches through this committee. I think we'd all have a better chance at asking pertinent questions, and the onus is on us as committee members to work in that fashion. So I think it's important that for the scheduling purposes of 21 people we have this set and we know that every Wednesday morning at 8:30 we're in this Assembly to do public accounts, period.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there discussion on Mrs. Black's motion? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those opposed? There's four. The motion is carried.

The next item on the agenda – and remember, you agreed to adopt this agenda – Questions by Members.

Mr. Payne.

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Chairman, on the question of questions by members, I sensed in our committee meetings last year that both opposition and government members seemed to be satisfied with the arrangement we adopted last year, which was the arrangement whereby each member would have one question and two supplementaries, which of course is more than we get in question period. I see no reason, frankly, to change that procedure, particularly because, as I say, it appeared to have been satisfactory to most, if not all, members of the committee. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that on being recognized by the Chair on a first come, first served basis, each member will have one question and two supplementaries. He or she would then drop to the bottom of the speaking order should additional questions be desired.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is everybody clear on the motion? Any discussion?

Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just one comment I would add to that, and that's piggybacking on Mrs. Black's comment. If we can cut the preambles down a little bit, we could facilitate the process and get more questions on. I know with question period typically we have something in the neighbourhood of three sentences or thereabouts as a preamble, and I think that would facilitate everything.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sure all members will take that comment into account.

Those in favour of the motion as presented by Mr. Payne?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone opposed? Motion carried.

Scope of Questions. This may get into the issue Mr. Bruseker just raised, and Mrs. Black prior to that.

Mrs. Osterman.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, I note that the latest accounts available are for '88-89, as well as the Auditor General's report. So I would move that the questions relate only to the fiscal year '88-89 Public Accounts reports and the Auditor General's report.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You've heard the motion by Mrs. Osterman. Is there any discussion on that motion?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, could I just briefly state that given my past experience for ministers to be well prepared, I think there are obviously volumes of information in one year's public accounts, and be well prepared, especially given that usually if you try to plough older ground, you're getting into

other people's responsibilities and so on. I think we could generate far better, precise information by having ministers prepared for a specific year as well as ourselves.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I didn't quite catch your last remark. Prepare . . .

MRS. OSTERMAN: We would generate better information by having ministers prepared for the specific year, the one just past that the accounts were prepared for.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I may just make a comment, I think we've tried to do that in the past few years. We've tried to have members of the committee, when they're asking questions on the public accounts, go so far as to even indicate the page and the line item. That seems to have sharpened at least the questioning by some members.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I haven't been on Public Accounts for a while. I was actually thinking of my ministerial experience, having found that people wandered over a map that went back a fair number of years, and it didn't seem to be very productive in terms of elucidating information.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you for that observation.

Any further discussion on the motion by Mrs. Osterman?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question has been asked. Those in favour, please signify in the usual way. Anyone opposed? The motion is carried.

Now we want to discuss just when we'd like the Auditor General to appear before us and how many days to discuss his report with us. Is there any feeling on that matter? Any thought on that matter, Mr. Hawkesworth?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: One question maybe to start us off. Would there be a meeting of this committee on April 18? As I recall, in keeping with a motion of the Assembly, the Assembly is going to rise on the afternoon of the 11th and not sit again until the 23rd. It would seem to me that certainly the Auditor General ought to be here, if he can, next Wednesday, but would it be feasible to ask him to come on the 18th as well?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's up to the committee to decide. Maybe we should ask Mrs. Black just what she intended in her motion. Was your intent all Wednesdays once we're in session or just Wednesday when we're sitting.

MRS. BLACK: When we're sitting, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So you'd have to introduce that as a special motion, to sit on the 18th to deal with the Auditor General's report. Is that . . . Maybe we should determine first how many days we'd like to have with the Auditor General. Then we could determine the days on which we'd actually meet with him.

Mr. Moore.

MR. MOORE: I think that whatever days are necessary. One probably will do it, but two if necessary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just by way of comment, usually we've found that we need two days to go through the Auditor General's report. But I'm in the hands of the committee. Would we like the Auditor General to spend two days with us? Is that the feeling?

Mrs. Laing.

MRS. B. LAING: Mr. Chairman, I would make that motion, that the Auditor General be here for two days.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Those in favour of the motion? It's carried.

Now, on what days? I would assume that next Wednesday we would like to invite the Auditor General to be with us. What would be the next day then? The 18th or the 25th?

MR. SHRAKE: The 25th sounds good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, would somebody care to make a motion? Mr. Lund.

MR. LUND: Mr. Chairman, I will move that it be on the 25th. So we will invite the Auditor General on the 11th and the 25th.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion before us that we invite the Auditor General for the 11th and the 25th. Is there any discussion on that motion?

MR. MOORE: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question? Those in favour of the motion as presented by Mr. Lund? All right. We will extend an invitation to the Auditor General to meet with us on April 11 and April 25.

The next item on the agenda, then, is the Procedure for Scheduling of Cabinet Ministers. Now, in my tenure as Chair of this committee we've used two different practices. When I was first elected Chair, there was a way in which the government members and opposition members alternated in terms of bringing cabinet ministers before the committee. Then in recent years there has been a tendency for the government members to bring down a list of cabinet members, and because they were in the obvious majority, that was the list that prevailed. With those remarks, I'll open it up for discussion.

Mr. Moore.

MR. MOORE: Well, it's worked out well with the list. We had a list last year and it was accepted by this committee. We went through I don't know how many. I think the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore said 10. That's somewhere near. That list is still in existence in the rotation that was agreed to last year.

You have two items on your agenda there that could be just about combined. How and who we select run one into the other. I see no reason why we wouldn't just continue on with that list. We've taken so many off; that way we get through them all. I'm getting into this next item on your agenda, but they are related. I see no reason why this wouldn't be acceptable, just to carry on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I see a significant number of committee members nodding their heads in agreement with your suggestion. It might help to clarify things, Mr. Moore, if you could just tell

us what the order would be if the members were to agree to your suggestion.

MR. MOORE: Well, I'll just go where we left off. It starts with the ministers of economic affairs, career development, public works, Agriculture, Treasurer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Moore, could you do it more slowly so members might be able to record that information?

MR. MOORE: Economic development; career development; Public Works, Supply and Services; Agriculture; Provincial Treasurer; Energy; Consumer and Corporate Affairs; Labour; Environment; Technology, Research and Telecommunications; Forestry, Lands and Wildlife; Solicitor General; Family and Social Services; Tourism; Health; Education; Attorney General; Recreation and Parks; Transportation and Utilities; and Municipal Affairs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I take it that you're moving a motion that we adopt our request to cabinet ministers to appear before the committee in the order you've just indicated.

MR. MOORE: I would like to make that a motion, in that order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. So we have a motion before us. Oh, Mr. Thurber. Sorry.

MR. THURBER: Not a problem, Mr. Chairman. I think that's a reasonable suggestion, because there were some comments raised different times that we didn't get to the Treasurer. I note that he is fifth on the list in this case, so we'd have a pretty good chance of reaching him. If one minister didn't happen to be available that day, we could just follow down the list and try and pick up on the next available minister. I would second that, if you need a seconder.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Mr. Hawkesworth.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, I think it was quite astounding that we didn't get the Provincial Treasurer last year, and I would think it would just be incumbent on this committee each and every year that the Provincial Treasurer be one of the first to come forward. Even if he's five on the list, that would mean that he wouldn't be here until May 30 at the absolute earliest, and it might not even be until June 6. It just seems to me that it would be more appropriate, to ensure that he were here, to put him as either the first or second and then the order as put forward by Mr. Moore.

So I would make that amendment: that the Provincial Treasurer be scheduled as shortly after the Auditor General as possible and that the list as put forward be amended accordingly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have an amendment to Mr. Moore's motion before us. So the discussion is on the amendment, which is that we should move the Treasurer as far forward as we can possibly get him, to appear before the committee.

Ms Laing.

MS M. LAING: I would support that. It seems to me that the Treasurer needs to be here early on in the process in order that

we get more of an overview. He stands in the same league in some sense as the Auditor General in that he has overall responsibility.

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Chairman, the question of scheduling the Provincial Treasurer I think can be approached from two quite different perspectives. I'm sympathetic to both, and that's why it's a bit of a difficult decision for me. I'm sympathetic to the argument that's just been made, that the Provincial Treasurer at the outset of our deliberations can set a framework or a backdrop which will serve as a point of reference for us throughout our deliberations; you know, there's some sense to that.

But in the two terms I've served on this committee, I can recall on more than one occasion where the comment was made, "Oh, in light of that response, Madam or Mr. Minister, perhaps that's an area, Mr. Chairman, we can refer to the Treasurer when he's here." Given those two conflicting perspectives, it seems to me that position number five in a ranking of 10 or 12 is a quite reasonable and workable compromise. Therefore, I'd like to speak against the proposed amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: No. I wish to speak to the motion in general. Sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anybody else wanting to speak to the amendment? Mrs. Laing.

MRS. B. LAING: Yes, I agree with Mr. Payne. Fifth place would put him in about the end of May. But also we have all of June, plus we'll be having a fall sitting, and that would place him sort of halfway through. I think that's a good slot; it gives a good perspective for all the other departments.

MR. CHUMIR: I'd like to see him at a very, very early spot, and if we have a load of questions, if there's a compelling need, then we can bring him back. After all, we're looking at the public accounts for close to \$11 billion of expenditure. We're the primary legislative watchdogs in that regard, and let's do the job right.

MR. MOORE: I can understand wanting the Provincial Treasurer in the number one spot, but realistically, when you look at the rotation we have here before us, the Provincial Treasurer in number five spot, look at the four above that: Economic Development, Agriculture, Public Works, and Career Development and Employment, all three major expenditure areas out there in the economic field that have impact on everybody in the province. We have these ministers come forward before us, and they will generate a lot of questions from their expenditure and how they did it and the impact on Alberta. That would come back with the Provincial Treasurer; coming in at this spot, he could answer. I think that to have the Provincial Treasurer as our head before we even generate questions or areas that we want broadened out from the Provincial Treasurer's perspective would eliminate the effectiveness of the Provincial Treasurer and us as a committee to get all the answers we're looking for. So I would have to be against moving the Provincial Treasurer to number one spot.

MR. SHRAKE: Yeah. I've had my own feelings on this, whether the Provincial Treasurer, Dick Johnston, is a nice chap

and all that and so on. But as far as having him in, he doesn't really have a department. I know he supposedly worked at the Treasury and all these types of things. But actually I was wanting to ask the minister of social services in, and he's way down the list. So I guess we all have our little druthers and our little pet hobbyhorses. Anyway, if we're going to change, I just wanted to move John Oldring up a little way. So I guess we'll just stay with the list then, if we're going to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't know what that's got to do with the motion.

In any event, we have a motion before us to move the Treasurer up into a higher priority. Are you ready for the question? Mr. Hawkesworth, do you want to close?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Do we get the opportunity to close debate? I just would say that if the argument is that we're going to be saving up all these questions to ask the Provincial Treasurer, then why does he appear before Energy, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Labour? Why does he appear before the three departments that spend somewhere around 60 to 70 percent of the provincial budget, being Family and Social Services, Health, Education? I mean, that argument, if you took it to its logical conclusion, should be that the Provincial Treasurer would be the last person that we hear from rather than the order that's been presented to us.

My point is that he should be first; then we get the overview. I agree with the comment from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. At the end of the process we should bring him back. We hear from the Auditor General twice, which is good. It helps us in the overview at the beginning. I think the same should be said for the Provincial Treasurer: at the beginning, and then, come the fall when we're back here to hear the remaining cabinet ministers, we should schedule the Provincial Treasurer at our last meeting so we can put to him those questions that were raised in our meetings with the other ministers. So I'm suggesting this is phase one of amending the list to get the Provincial Treasurer before us early in the process, and then if people have questions, he can come later on at the end of the process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question on the amendment then? Those in favour of the amendment, please indicate. Those opposed? The amendment is narrowly defeated.

The question on the motion, then, which is to adopt the order as indicated by Mr. Moore. Okay, Mr. Bruseker on that.

MR. BRUSEKER: I would like to speak against this particular motion to adopt this order. The reasons are simply this: if we assume we sit to the end of June, we could possibly get as far as the Environment minister on this list. Before we would get to Family and Social Services, Health, and Education, we would have to have at least a seven- and probably eight-week session in the fall. So it's entirely possible, therefore - which I think is probably unlikely - that we would not get to these ministers that spend the greatest chunk of the budget from their departments conceivably until a year from today, which would mean it would be three years before we had the opportunity to question these ministers.

Now, if we are attempting to balance the budget over the long term, if we can have impact, it's likely going to be in those departments that expend currently the greatest amount of money. If we can effect or suggest a 1 percent savings in the Health or Education budgets, it would have a far greater impact

than in a smaller department such as *Economic Development and Trade*, which relatively speaking, compared to these departments, has quite a small financial expenditure. So to have these very large departments way down the list I think would be inappropriate, and therefore I would move that we schedule immediately extra meetings to meet those ministers who have large expenditures of money. Mr. Shrake mentioned the possibility that if we feel a burning need to do our job, we could schedule meetings. I'm suggesting that I feel a burning need to meet with those ministers who expend such a large portion of our budget. So I would speak against the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've got to decide, I guess, whether that question is . . .

MR. MOORE: We have a motion on the floor, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm not sure what Mr. Bruseker is proposing. Is he proposing a further amendment to the motion that's on the floor?

MR. BRUSEKER: I would make an amendment, therefore, Mr. Chairman, that we move Family and Social Services, Health, and Education to the top of the list instead of . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: We could go on forever suggesting motions that will move different departments up. We've already tested the water, so to speak, with one motion. I'm prepared to do it once again on this particular amendment. Is there any discussion on this amendment?

MS M. LAING: Well, I really have to support this amendment, because the three departments that have just been named are the departments where the government repeatedly says, "We have to cut spending, and we have to cut costs." Those arguments are targeted against those three departments more than any other department. It would seem to me that if a Public Accounts Committee is a watchdog committee to see where there has been waste and poorly thought out spending, then it should be our job to help the government deal with the departments they see as the most troublesome. To not be able to have the minister before us for a period of three years seems to me to be irresponsible on our part in terms of being supportive of wise fiscal management.

MR. MOORE: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm very, very surprised to hear anyone say that a dollar spent in one department has more value than a dollar spent in another department. I think every department is important. They impact on people, and I don't rate one above the other. We're all in here to serve people one hundred percent from every area, and no matter where the dollars are allocated, it's still our responsibility to look at it. To start prioritizing and saying one is more important than the other - like, to say that social services is a more important department than the economic development department, which generates the capital that should hopefully pay for the social services, or agriculture is of less importance than the ones mentioned. I think they're all of equal importance, and we treat them that way in this government. We treat them with equal respect and equal [inaudible] in saying that they're out there serving the public. So I don't classify them. Others may do that, but that's their way of doing it. I think everybody's area of responsibility is important, and I think we should go on with the list the way it is.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I think my colleague has dealt with a lot of things. I think it's important that we get on with the job. Everyone has a department that they would like to see, and certainly I have the departments I would like to see up at the top of the list, too, but let's get the scheduling done and let's get the job started here.

I like the scheduling the way it is. I'm quite looking forward to seeing the economic development group in here off the top. I find that we are looking at something that is providing diversification programs, providing for the future, that is going to fund all these other programs, and I'd like to see what we're doing there and what controls are in place.

So I think we could waste all morning going over who has their favourite department and who wants to have it at the top of the list. I think it's imperative that we get on with this thing and get the job going now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms Laing asked to be recognized again. Does the committee agree? I think she'd probably like to make a comment.

MS M. LAING: May I rebut? I guess I didn't say that social services, Health, and Education were more important but, in fact, that they were the largest spenders and they were the most often targeted as having misspent. We don't very often hear government say we have to cut down on spending in the area of economic development, although I might well agree with Mrs. Black that probably that's a department we do need to look at.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Any further discussion on the amendment? Mr. Lund wants to comment.

MR. LUND: Mr. Chairman, I find it rather confusing. A moment ago we heard how important it was that the Provincial Treasurer be up near the top, and we've got him currently scheduled for number five. Now we have an amendment saying that we're going to move three more in ahead of him. I don't quite understand the logic to this, so I would vote very much opposed . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Every member of the committee is entitled to move an amendment, Mr. Lund.

In any event, are you ready for the question on the amendment?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour of the amendment, which is to move those three departments up? Those opposed? The amendment is defeated.

Back to the main motion. Those in favour of it? Is there any further discussion on the main motion, which is . . .

MR. SHRAKE: Call for the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Call for the question. But you can't cut off debate that way. If someone wants to comment, they may.

Seeing no hands, those in favour of the motion as presented by Mr. Moore? Those opposed? Motion carried. So that really dealt with items E and F together.

MR. MOORE: Mr. Chairman, could I make a motion related to the last motion? This motion is: in case the minister is not available on the day he is to appear, on the rotation list, that the first available minister on the rotation change positions with him. That gives you the opportunity just to move one up and move one down.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think somebody suggested that earlier in the discussion. I think it's on the record. We'll try to honour that the best we can in terms of scheduling ministers. We do have to take into account other commitments they may have, but we'll try to remain as true as we can. I don't think that requires . . .

MR. MOORE: [Inaudible] just to change positions with the next one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If we can do that. I don't think it requires a motion. That's just the technique, I guess, by which we'd try and . . . Unless you want to put it as a motion.

MR. MOORE: No, it's on the record that we're going to do that. The thing is that they don't drop to the bottom of the list. We wouldn't want to see the Provincial Treasurer get up there and, if he isn't available, drop down to the bottom of the list, because we want him up there for his due chance on the first opportunity in the fifth or sixth spot.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next item on the agenda is . . .

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to put another motion before the committee arising from the discussion we had earlier. That has to do with extra meetings. I think it's clear from the list that's been presented to us and our best estimates of what the length of the session will be, including the possibility of a fall sitting, that even taking all that into account, we'll probably only get halfway through the list. In the very best optimistic speculation, if we have that length of session and a fall sitting, we'll probably only get through half the list that was presented this morning. Some members earlier were saying that we're not limited to Wednesday. So I'm going to take them at their word and presume that was put forward with the idea that that's a real possibility. So I'd like to move we schedule two meetings on Friday, April 27, and on Friday, May 4, both meetings to go from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m., in order that we're able to call further ministers to review the public accounts in their departments.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry. I have a conflict on April 27. I have to be in Calgary in the afternoon and on . . . Did you say May 4?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: I'm sorry, I'm booked already Friday.

MR. LUND: Mr. Chairman, I have a great deal of problem with that. Some of us have things scheduled in our constituencies on a regular basis on Friday, and some of us can't jump on an airplane and get there in 20 minutes. So I just have great difficulty with us going and scheduling something like that that we have already set aside for our constituency work.

MR. BRUSEKER: I would like to speak in support of this motion. I already indicated that I feel there are some ministers who are too far down the list and will not be seen for in excess of three years, and I think we need to schedule some kind of time. To simply stonewall, as we see apparently happening, suggests that there really is not an intention here for the Public Accounts Committee to see some of these ministers for as much as three years. So if these dates are unacceptable, I would suggest that these hon. members either find the time or excuse themselves from attending at that particular time.

MR. MOORE: I think it's an excellent idea; however, it's premature. I don't know where you people who are moving this have a crystal ball that says this is going to happen down the road. I don't know where you have it. I thought we said at the beginning that it wouldn't be political speeches and rhetoric; it would be straight questions. I see us, if we abide by that – and I think the hon. member who just spoke said that would be a good idea – we would get through this whole list in this spring session. There is no question about it. We could get through if they went straight to questions. So I think we're being absolutely premature. We have to see what's going to happen.

I am prepared now, if we need extra time and we see getting down to the end that we have to come in on the Wednesdays, when we're all here at 6 in the morning to 8 in the morning, add those extra two hours every Wednesday morning for the committee. I think that would be an ideal way to pick it up rather than bring people back on weekends and when they're out planning that. We're here, and I'm sure nobody has anything scheduled for 6 o'clock on Wednesday mornings. So I think it would be an ideal thing.

But let's give it a try. Let's see what's going – let's not have a crystal ball. We don't run the government that way. I don't know why other people think we should do it. They look down the road and say this is going to happen or that's going to happen. Who knows? But I can tell you that if we stick to questions only, we have no problem. So we'll watch who gives all the rhetoric and who gives the political speeches and who forces it down the road. But let's wait and see how it works. I think that's in all fairness, out of respect for the committee as a whole and our responsible way of handling things. I think we can get through it. I have no concern about that whatsoever. I think if we act responsibly, we can get this through, and in a fall session, no problem.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, my colleague from Lacombe has made some of the comments that I would have made in response: already, now, looking ahead and perceiving that we can't conduct the business of this committee.

But I also wanted to say that I have sympathy. When we do look at our schedule within several weeks, see how well we're doing, and possibly come to the conclusion that we should set meetings, we must respect some of the rural members who must drive; there's no other way to travel. I know that whether I drive or fly, I'm still looking at about two and a half hours by the time I get somewhere and then drive back to the constituency, and travel time on Friday is very critical. It is when we are here that I believe it is most responsible. I guess as a rural person getting up at quarter after 5 every morning – unfortunately I can't seem to change that habit – I'd be delighted with an early-morning meeting. So if we could on that basis several weeks down the road readdress this question, I would urge all hon. members to think about those people who must drive some

distance, because it is nigh on to impossible to conduct your constituency business on the weekend without utilizing that time.

MR. BRADLEY: I would want to make one amendment to Mr. Moore's suggestion. Rather than starting at 6 o'clock on Wednesday mornings, perhaps a session from 7 to 8:30 and 8:30 to 10 would be more appropriate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not on the amendment.

MR. BRADLEY: I'm just commenting on his suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.
Mr. Shrake.

MR. SHRAKE: Yes. It's fine for some of those early risers. But for some of us who are really not morning people, it's a real dreadful thought coming down here at 6 o'clock. It means I've got to get up at 5 in order to make it here by 6. Gee, I find that a very terrible thought. I guess it could be done. I could just stay up all night, I guess, and come straight in.

But seriously, I think somebody misinterpreted our comment earlier. If they come in at one of the meetings and they say, "There is this department, I have these questions I want to ask, and I feel it is very, very important to ask these questions," I figure, fine. I'll stay here Friday afternoon; I'll be here Wednesday evening or Monday morning. I'll get here on time and make it for the meeting. But I would like for them to come - just randomly right now off the top of their heads to say, "Oh, well, let's heave in these extra meetings right away," I think is not in the spirit of things. Hopefully the questions they are going to ask are those burning questions - I'll be listening - and hopefully they're a little better than the ones that I heard last session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You mean no political speeches?
Anyway, Mr. Thurber.

MR. THURBER: Yes, Mr. Chairman. There's another fact that we haven't taken into consideration. If you're talking about Friday mornings or 6 o'clock in the morning, I'm easy on either one of them because I'm only about two hours from home. But the other thing is that a lot of the ministers have functions they have to attend to on Friday afternoons and Friday evenings, and they can be a long way from here. I think if we're going to set up a meeting for any of these times, we have to talk to the appropriate minister and find out what his schedule is beforehand as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Black asked to be recognized a second time. Because I extended that privilege to Ms Laing, maybe . . .

MRS. BLACK: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think as far as the motion goes, scheduling two meetings on those particular days, it's rather unfair that we don't have the opportunity to check calendars and dates, et cetera, to see what dates we are not booked. I know myself I am booked on both those days back in Calgary, both Friday afternoons. I certainly would be prepared to look at my own calendar and look at dates that I'm not already booked, and maybe we could talk about that later. I know myself I take this committee very seriously, and I do not like to miss a meeting. I would be quite upset if a meeting was scheduled at a time when I already had a commitment. So I

think it's a little bit unfair to just throw out two dates when they're not that far off and some of us have already made commitments, and I'm sure ministers have as well. So I'd rather see us really put some thought into it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right.
Mr. Hawkesworth.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, to close debate, Mr. Chairman . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, sorry.
Ms Laing.

MS M. LAING: What I would suggest is that if in fact it's very difficult to set dates today, it be part of the agenda, an agenda item, of the meeting not next week but of the 25th and that we all commit ourselves to bringing our calendars. At that time we'll have some sense of how this committee is working, and at that point in time look to setting additional meeting times.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hawkesworth, to close debate.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, to close debate, Mr. Chairman. Earlier in the meeting when the suggestion was made that every Wednesday was not going to be sufficient in order to get to a majority of the ministers of this government, some members said: "Well, look. Why don't we have a look at Friday afternoon as a way of scheduling extra meetings to get extra ministers?" So I just took people at their word that when they made that statement, they were saying that was a real possibility. I presumed they were saying sincerely that that was an option available to the committee, so I took them up on their offer and put it in the form of a motion. Now I find that wasn't a realistic option in their minds after all. So I don't know; maybe we have to do this a little more informally, with the chairman canvassing the members and setting up some times. I may very well take up Mr. Moore on his suggestion that we meet at 7 o'clock on a Wednesday morning in order that we get more ministers. Well, his suggestion was 6; another, I guess, was Mr. Bradley, who said 7. We'd hear from most of the ministers for an hour and a half; 7 to 8:30 would fit into that time schedule. I'm certainly quite interested and prepared to pursue that. Perhaps that would be a notice of motion for next week's meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At the moment, though, we do have a motion on the floor, which is to meet on those two Fridays that you specified.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour of the amendment as proposed by Mr. Hawkesworth? Those opposed? Amendment defeated. Sorry; that wasn't an amendment. That was a separate motion.

Any other items under point 4 on the agenda?

Item 5 is the possibility of establishing a subcommittee to study this document, Guidelines for Public Accounts Committees in Canada. As I indicated, there will be a meeting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees held in Newfoundland in July. Mr. Moore and myself will be attending that conference, and one of the subjects for discussion at that

meeting will be this Guidelines for Public Accounts Committees. They've asked public accounts committees from across Canada to study this document and prepare suggestions that could be taken forward to be incorporated into a revised version of this.

Unfortunately, there's no provision, financially or otherwise, I guess, for this committee to have subcommittee meetings to look at this document. But if there are members of this committee who would like to meet informally with me to go over this on quite an ad hoc basis to study the document and come forward with resolutions that were amendments to this document, I'd be quite prepared to listen to those discussions and after discussion, if we can arrive at any consensus, take any recommendations that would come forward on that basis to Newfoundland, to the deliberations there, and see them incorporated in this document.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Chairman, it occurs to me that what the suggestion does is automatically precipitate at least one meeting of this committee to look at whatever might evolve as a result of your informal subcommittee or whatever, because obviously neither you nor the vice-chairman can go down to a meeting and speak on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee in Alberta without that kind of concurrence. I think we have to consider whether that is time valuably spent. If we believe that that be true, I would suggest that, as well, a lot of documentation in terms of past studies and information on the operation of public accounts committees must be brought forward to this committee. Because I don't think I would feel I had done my job, to look at one document in isolation of the dearth of information that there is. Given that, we are undertaking a pretty major task. I wonder out loud, because I haven't really come to a conclusion on this, whether we are able to properly do that given our first mandate, and that's the examination of public accounts. As much as I am a big-picture person and interested in that bigger picture, I think it's right now premature to discuss our ability to handle such a task.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I appreciate your comments. Perhaps I should make it clear that when Mr. Moore and myself commented on this document – and I believe we both voted to support it in principle – we made it very clear at that time that we were doing so as individuals, that we weren't committing ourselves on behalf of the province of Alberta or this committee in any way, because we don't have the legislative authority to do that for one thing. So we were expressing our own views. I think people who attend that meeting are not really expressing the views either of their Legislatures or their public accounts committees. Nevertheless, I'm just basically saying that if there are members of this committee who would like to inform my and Mr. Moore's participation in these discussions, we'd be welcome to meet with those individuals on some kind of ad hoc, very informal, nonlegislative basis.

MRS. OSTERMAN: In that case, Mr. Chairman, I think those people who are interested and have had some more recent experience and sense of the matter obviously should feel free to participate, because if it's on an individual basis, it does not tie any of us to a commitment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But perhaps you do raise a good point. Maybe at some point during the year when the members have had a chance to look at this document and study it we may want to devote part of one of our committee meetings to looking at this document and deciding what recommendations or course of

action we as a committee might want to take with respect to the document. I might suggest that we do that later in the session.

MR. CHUMIR: I think there's a great need for that. I think one of the things we should be looking at is ways to improve the process and the effectiveness of this committee. The document in issue refers globally to many changes that are perceived to be needed in procedures across the country. The concern I have is that this committee as presently constituted, from the comments I'm hearing, seems to think that the process and procedures are just tickety-boo as opposed to needing change and reform. If that's the case, then perhaps we're just wasting time. But I think that's the priority issue: to look for ways to improve this. I think there are innumerable ways.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you making any suggestion for action, though, or are you making just a point?

MR. CHUMIR: I think we should be reviewing this document in some detail. But I'm also expressing a forlorn view that perhaps there is no real interest in change of any kind on the committee. I hear a sense of dissatisfaction from the opposition members and great satisfaction with the process from the government side generally on what is supposed to be, I'd say, very clearly the most nonpartisan of the committees in this Legislature. I would like to see that, but perhaps you'd want to take a straw vote from members of the committee to determine who feels there is need for change and improvement and who, on the other hand, feels that the process is just fine and let's leave well enough alone.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would it be just as expeditious for people who feel that some improvement is necessary to come and . . . Just give me a list of names. Well, maybe that's not the right way to do it either.

MR. CHUMIR: Why don't we take a straw vote?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the information that you've handed out as chairman to the committee. It's always, I think, beneficial to everyone to get additional information on what other thoughts are. But I was wondering: could those who are interested possibly book what I call fireside chats and sit down and discuss these things on an informal basis? Quite often you come up with some ideas of what's in the report, I think first of all, and then over a cup of coffee sit down and talk about concepts and ideas. I think that's sometimes a better venue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I circulated a time sheet or whatever to find out when people would be available, are there any members of this committee who would be interested in meeting as Mrs. Black has just proposed – I'll do a straw vote on that – just to sit down and take a look at this document? Well, everybody on the committee. I'll try to do that on the understanding . . .

MR. CHUMIR: That's not quite accurate. Point of order. Everybody's hand was not raised, Mr. Chairman, on that. I don't think it's fair to say everybody in the committee expressed interest.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there was a fair . . . Not everybody. Okay, I'll let the record . . .

MR. CHUMIR: That's not accurate. The record for posterity will reflect that everybody on the committee reflected interest. My sense is that is not accurate, that the majority of this committee ultimately would say that the process is tickety-boo.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Who would be interested in meeting informally to look at these guidelines for public accounts committees? I agree; it's not . . . Well, with one exception it's virtually unanimous.

In any event, okay, I'll try to arrange something along those lines, and as a result of those conversations we may put it on the agenda, then, of some future meeting.

But I think your other question was how many people . . . I'm not sure there's going to be any purpose served by asking that particular question at this point. Let's review the document and see what recommendations we might like to make that would ensue from looking at the document.

MR. PAYNE: Just a comment about the publication, Mr. Chairman, and I certainly don't mean improperly to denigrate it. But I would ask the members of the committee to look up at the press gallery. Then I'd refer them to page 2 of the appendix which says that the public accounts committee "receives a great deal of press coverage and public attention." I would hope that comment isn't typical of the accuracy and realism found elsewhere in it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Which page are you talking about?

MR. PAYNE: Page 2 of the appendix.

MR. CHUMIR: They're talking about public accounts committees that hear the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I take it that's a comment, not a suggestion for action.

MR. PAYNE: A much needed touch of humour, I trust, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; very good.

Next item on the agenda. We've dealt with item 6, the date of the next meetings. We've already agreed that we'd meet a week from today and then on the 25th and every Wednesday during session thereafter.

Mr. Moore, I take it you're prepared to make your usual motion at this time.

MR. MOORE: I move that we adjourn till next week at 8:30 a.m. on April 11.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour of the motion? We're adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:42 a.m.]

