

10:01 a.m.

Wednesday, April 28, 1993

[Chairman: Mr. Pashak]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call today's meeting to order and perhaps apologize for the 10 o'clock starting time. I know we'd previously approved a motion that said we would call our meetings at 8:30 a.m., but we did that to accommodate private Bills and they're not meeting today. I thought that, hopefully, I wouldn't inconvenience any of our members. I thought maybe some members might appreciate a 10 o'clock start time rather than an 8:30 time.

MR. MOORE: Well, I just move that for this meeting, your honour, we meet at 10. So we aren't upsetting anybody's appercart, I make it a motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; agreed.

Now, the chairman's report. I had the pleasure of taking our committee budget estimates for 1993-94 before the Members' Services Committee. Mr. Moore, I believe, was a member of the Members' Services Committee and also commented on our budget proposals. The proposal we took was significantly reduced, especially in relation to pay to members. Now, I had to report at the meeting that one member in fact did claim for sitting during session, and that member subsequently returned to Treasury the amount of pay he claimed and received. We still have a minor item on the budget, though, that does permit members to claim, but I think we have an agreement among all our party Whips that no one will make a claim for committee work while we're in session.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We made a submission for funds to attend the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation conference. They were deleted. We submitted a proposal consistent with other committees for spousal travel, but the Members' Services Committee deleted all spousal travel as well in terms of their recommendations. However, they did provide for our committee to determine itself whether we will send one delegate to the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and one to the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation conference. They deleted the conference fee of \$650 from our budget, though, to attend that conference. I mean, what it comes down to is that from the point of view of members of the committee, we have a choice: we can either send two delegates, usually the chair and the co-chair, to the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees or send one delegate to that conference and one to the Comprehensive Auditing Foundation. So what is your pleasure?

MR. MOORE: Well, first of all, I'd like to compliment you on the budget because it certainly shows leadership when you cut a budget by 55 percent. That's leadership to all departments and agencies dealing with government money. That shows leadership on the part of public accounts.

However, on your question of selection of delegates, I would like to move

that we send two just to the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, that being the chairman and the vice-chairman.

If I could just add to that, I say that because I know the Auditor General is only going to that one too.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion on the motion, which is that we send two delegates from this committee to the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees? That will include the secretary of the committee as well.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No discussion? A call for the question. Those in favour? Motion approved.

Maybe I should just point out - I notice we have a number of guests in the gallery - that this is a meeting of one of the standing committees of the Alberta Legislature. It's the Public Accounts Committee. It has 21 members from all parties. Basically, our purpose is to review government expenditures, but today this is essentially just an organizational meeting. We came back into session one week ago, and we have to clear up some routine business that affects the committee.

The next item of business. We have to determine what might happen in the event of an election. Now, if there is no election, we've just decided that the chairman of the committee and the vice-chairman will attend this conference. But if an election should be called between now and July, this committee will cease to exist. In that event, we would not have any authorization to send delegates to the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees. My hope would be that if there is an election, even if we don't go back into session, the governing party would know who they would be appointing as the vice-chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Official Opposition would know who they would be appointing to serve as the chair of that committee. Perhaps it would be reasonable, since there is a budget provision for this amount - although there wouldn't be statutory authority to do this, I think a government that wished to do so could permit those two individuals to attend this conference. I don't think we need a motion to that effect. I just want to have my remarks inserted on the record so the next government can look at today's meeting and that might be evidence they take into account in making a decision.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: That's fair enough, Mr. Chairman. I didn't see all the hands, but I believe the motion was carried unanimously. Currently all three political parties represented on this committee endorse the motion, so that might be the authority you're looking for.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Would any member like to express a reservation about what I've just suggested? That would be important to have on the record as well.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's agreed. Okay. Thank you very much.

Now, previously I circulated a report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I didn't know whether we would be having a session in advance of the election, so in effect Mr. Moore and I looked at the report. We agreed to its contents, so in a sense it has already been approved. I circulated it to all members of the committee because I would like to table it in the Legislature. I would be open to any concerns or questions members might have about the report.

MR. BRASSARD: I move approval of that report, Mr. Chairman. I think we've all had a chance to review it, and it seems to be in order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we can accept that motion. Is there any discussion on Mr. Brassard's motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question's called. Those in favour? Thank you. I would take that as authority to table the report in the Assembly.

Other Business. This gets a little tricky. We approved a scheduling of ministers to appear before the committee and met with a number of ministers. Since last fall, of course, the Auditor General has released his new report. It's usually standard practice on the part of this committee to bring the Auditor General before the committee to introduce his new report, and we usually spend two days with him. Now, if we're going to deal with cabinet ministers' estimates on the basis of the new report, we'll have to bring the Auditor General before this committee. There's a problem in doing that, of course, which is that if there is an election, we may bring the Auditor General here for just one or two meetings and we'd have an election, a whole new committee, and then the Auditor General would have to come back before the committee and repeat that process. The alternative is that if we're going to bring a cabinet minister before the committee, we continue with the financial year that ended in 1991, which is where we left off in the fall.

Now, I'm not sure which direction you'd like me to take with respect to this issue. I think I saw Mr. Thurber first on the issue.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It would seem to me this is just an extension of our last session. So we would just go with the list we had; would we not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that's true. We did ask Mr. Sparrow to appear before the committee to deal with expenditures of his department or at least one area of his responsibilities for the year ended March 31, 1991. He is unable to come next week, so would we just go down the list and ask the minister to comment on the '91 expenditure year?

MR. THURBER: That was my thought, because it is just an extension of the last session.

10:11

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, there's a question of relevance here for the work of the committee. I don't believe anybody would believe we want to deal with two years in the past if we have information for the most recent complete fiscal year. Regardless of when this committee was struck and the fact that this session we're in started over a year ago, we have more relevant information to deal with. I can't believe we would want to consider ourselves so irrelevant as to deal with historical events when we have more relevant information before us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would it be your suggestion, then, that we bring the Auditor General before the committee next week to talk about his 1992 report?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, that would make sense to me, Mr. Chairman. Even if he were to have to appear a second time for a new committee a month or two months or three months down the

road - who knows? - it would be an excellent briefing for the new members in any event and a worthwhile exercise for whoever might be on that new committee later in the year. I personally wouldn't consider it a waste of time if the Auditor General were to be called by some future Public Accounts Committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you making that a motion, that we invite the Auditor General to a meeting next Wednesday?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: To invite the Auditor General? Sure. At 8:30?

MR. McEACHERN: All for 1992.

MR. CHAIRMAN: To deal with his 1992 report.

We have a motion before us. Is there any discussion on the motion?

MR. McEACHERN: Yes, if I could just add a couple of points. Certainly the relevance argument is an important one, but we have no proof at this stage that there will be an election call next week, say, or the week after or whenever. This Legislature - and I'm thinking on a sort of legal basis idea - has until March 19 of next year to call an election. We've had no Speech from the Throne and they're promising us a budget, so we're still in the Fourth Session. On the other hand, if we don't use the latest and most relevant information, then I think our committee becomes irrelevant. So it would just make sense to move on to the latest information.

MR. MOORE: There are some valid points on both sides of the argument, Mr. Chairman. However, this is a continuation of a session we're in. We've had several ministers that have not reported on the handling of their funds for a period of time. I don't think excluding them is right in the interests of the taxpayers of Alberta. We'll have ample opportunity here to review those in the new report. I think we should complete the job we were given and the mandate we were given. We'll proceed with the next minister on the list, bring them forward, and then in due course we will get to the other ministers. It's just like building a house without a foundation. They aren't putting the foundation in; they're going to the roof. You can't do that. The NDP might build houses that way, but we don't operate that way. I think we should get all the facts out from where we left off and proceed to the next round when we've completed our examination of those departments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Any further discussion?

MR. McEACHERN: Just a rebuttal to that point. It seems the government members have no qualms about not completing the list in a normal year, and certainly we will not in this year. I mean, we get a long list of cabinet ministers we want to see and we're only allowed to sit during the session, so we never get more than halfway through them. That doesn't seem to bother these guys. So now why do they want to complete the list all of a sudden when they know darned well we're not going to complete it anyway because we're only going to get one person before us? Why don't we just start on something relevant like the latest Auditor General's report?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, let's see if you were able to convince other members of the committee.

MR. McEACHERN: That's what I'm trying to do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Paszkowski.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can recall very literally sitting in this same room and listening to the same people indicate it's so important that we get a chance to discuss this with all the ministers. I think that's in *Hansard*. That point has been made very clearly by the same gentlemen who today want to change the rules and change the procedure. Therefore, in order to maintain the consistency that has been recommended by the same people who are wanting to break with tradition today, I think we should retain our format of discussing issues with the ministers in the order they have been designated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Severtson.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to refer back to your opening comments with reference to scheduling. You suggested that if we call the Auditor General to the committee next week and an election is called, we'd have to do the same process over again. It's a new committee there, and I think we'd be wasting the time of the committee and the Auditor General in doing the same thing maybe two or three times in a row. I would go on the suggestions you implied in your opening remarks and vote against this motion and continue with our list.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hawkesworth, is it fair enough that this concludes debate on the subject?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Just so I'm clear, the motion is for the Auditor General to come before the committee to address his report for the fiscal year 1991, ended March 31, 1992. Now, that fiscal year ended over a year ago. The fiscal year 1992-1993 is over with, but we don't have the Auditor General's report. Right now we're in fiscal year 1993-1994. Now, I hear members behind me saying that they want us to go back and review the spending in fiscal year 1990-1991. That's a fiscal year almost three years ago. If I wish, I can open any history book in my spare time and enjoy what lessons can be learned there, but it seems to me what's guiding this province today is not that fiscal year as much as the Auditor's report that's before us. Now, tradition is that when the Public Accounts Committee meets in the spring session, they deal with the most relevant, most recent Auditor General's report, the most relevant, most recent public accounts available, and we get on with our job of being relevant. If this group here wishes to be irrelevant and wants the vote to be irrelevant, go ahead; make my day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Seeing no other speakers, then, those in favour of the motion that we bring the Auditor General before the committee . . .

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Could we have a recorded vote, Mr. Chairman?

MR. MOORE: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question's been called. Those in favour of the motion? Those opposed? The motion is defeated.

[For the motion: Mr. Hawkesworth, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. McEachern]

[Against the motion: Ms Calahasen, Mr. Clegg, Mr. Drobot, Mr. McFarland, Mr. Moore, Mr. Musgrove, Mr. Paszkowski, Mr. Severtson, Mr. Thurber]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Moore, would you care to make a motion with respect to the next meeting?

MR. MOORE: I move
that we proceed with the list we approved previously, that your office contact the next minister available to appear at our next meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would you care to name a time?

MR. MOORE: At 8:30 next Wednesday morning, on our regular meeting time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a motion from Mr. Moore that we meet at our regularly scheduled time of 8:30 one week hence and that we would continue with the rotation of ministers appearing before the committee as we've previously approved. Any discussion on the motion?

MR. McEACHERN: Who will be the minister? You mentioned Sparrow, but who's next on the list?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. McEACHERN: If we can get the Minister of Municipal Affairs, does this then mean that we will only be allowed to ask questions for the 1990-91 fiscal year but not 1991-92, even though we have the public accounts on 1991-92?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's correct.

MR. McEACHERN: Then I think that's a great exercise in irrelevance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've already debated that issue, hon. member.

Okay. The question's been called. Those in favour? Anyone opposed?

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Could I have my opposition recorded please, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. McEACHERN: And mine.

[For the motion: Mr. Brassard, Ms Calahasen, Mr. Clegg, Mr. Drobot, Mr. McFarland, Mr. Moore, Mr. Musgrove, Mr. Paszkowski, Mr. Severtson, Mr. Thurber]

[Against the motion: Mr. Hawkesworth, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. McEachern]

MR. SEVERTSON: I move we adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 10:21 a.m.]

