

8:30 a.m. Wednesday, September 29, 1993

[Chairman: Mrs. Abdurahman]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning. I'll call our meeting to order. I'd like once again to welcome Merwan Saher. Could I have approval of the agenda, please?

MR. MAGNUS: I'll move.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All in favour? Agreed. Thank you.

The first thing I have to do is bring to your attention that unfortunately we have no minutes and there are no transcripts from *Hansard*. They have a backlog because of the parliamentary reforms that have taken place. Hopefully we will have everything up to date as of next week. Is there anything you'd like to add to that, Corinne?

MRS. DACYSHYN: No, I don't think so.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I sincerely apologize for that. *Hansard* staff have really been overwhelmed with extra responsibilities.

Outstanding Business: Committee Funding (Approved Budget Estimates 1993-94). We had a motion that had been tabled, and it was agreed that it would be brought forward at this meeting. So at this time I would ask Mr. Bruseker if he wishes to speak to his motion.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, Madam Chairman, I have spoken to the motion. I'm not sure if there are other members who wish to speak to it before I close debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The question's been called. All in favour of the motion?

MR. AMERY: What was the motion? Sorry, I just . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's fine. I'd hoped that Mr. Bruseker would at least close debate.

MR. BRUSEKER: The motion that I had before the committee was that the committee should meet outside of session. The rationale behind that, Madam Chairman and members of the committee, was that under Standing Order 50, I believe, the "Public Accounts . . . stand referred to the Public Accounts Committee." I interpret that to mean that we should then do a thorough job of reviewing all of the departments of the government and examining the spending habits, if you will, of the various departments. In the four years that I have been a member of the Public Accounts Committee, the committee has never, has never, covered all of the departments. Inevitably we have to leave some out. So I think that it is incumbent upon members of the committee to do a thorough job of reviewing all of the departments. While in the future that may not be necessary if we have longer sessions and a smaller cabinet and fewer departments to review, it is for this current public accounts 1991-92, which we are attempting to discuss at this time. We have a number of departments, and given the likelihood of a relatively short sitting this fall and '92-93 accounts coming up in the springtime, I think we need to have a thorough examination of these. That's the purpose behind the motion.

So the motion, just to repeat, is that we sit outside of session to ensure that we can examine all of the departments.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If there's no objection, I'd like to entertain a question from Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: I apologize that I wasn't able to be here at the last two meetings, and I do appreciate that you did keep this thing open until I was able to attend. The concern I have is not so much dealing with whether or not it would be good business to have meetings out of session. In my case, it's approximately a \$500 expense just to get me here and back to Peace River out of session. Since we have 21 members, even if we assume that that cost is only about half on an average, I think that would be a fairly horrendous expense to undertake. I know, Muriel, that in earlier conversation you had suggested that it would be possible to try and put it together with some other function that is going on anyway and thereby save the cost. But I got thinking about it, and I have trouble believing that there would be such a thing that all 21 of us would be attending out of session. I have serious reservations about the cost versus the benefit of this. I would have to be opposed to it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Ty.

MR. LUND: Are we opening up the debate again, Madam Chairman?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, that's why I asked if there are any objections to Gary speaking to the motion.

MR. LUND: If we are, I just would want to make an observation. We're hearing from the proposer of this motion in fact how important it is that we spend all this time, yet this very morning that we're discussing it, only half the members from that party are here, and they came late. So I really have trouble taking seriously what some of the members are saying.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I was brought to order for mentioning who was not in the House yesterday. I believe that that is not an appropriate parliamentary comment.

MR. LUND: I will withdraw that. I'm sorry that I brought it to the attention of everyone.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Any further debate or questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just in closing, then, if I may. I understand the Member for Peace River's concern, Madam Chairman, but when you have a deficit of \$3.8 billion, it seems to me that the relatively small expenditure of bringing people together to examine past expenditures so that we can perhaps make some proposals about saving money in the future would be a worthwhile expenditure.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
The debate has been closed. All in favour of the motion? Against? The motion has been lost.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Could we have a recorded vote on that, please?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly. Something that has to be clarified with me: can someone abstain from voting, within the parliamentary procedure?

AN HON. MEMBER: Abstention is negative.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So I would like to call the question again. If you don't wish to vote, I understand that you have to leave the Assembly. All in favour of the motion? Against? It's been duly recorded.

[For the motion: Mr. Bruseker, Ms Carlson, Mr. Vasseur]

[Against the motion: Mr. Amery, Mrs. Burgener, Ms Calahasen, Mr. Coutts, Mr. Friedel, Mrs. Fritz, Mr. Lund, Mr. Magnus, Mr. McFarland, Mr. Pham, Mr. Sohal, Mr. Stelmach, Dr. L. Taylor]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Moving on, then, to 4(a)(ii), Use of Existing Unused Funds for Research. Anyone wishing to speak to this item?

Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: I was going to ask a question. Does the fact that it's on the agenda indicate that there is a suggestion of the type of research, or is it just as a leader?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It was based on the recommendations of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, where there is a recommendation that fits into the ability of Public Accounts across Canada having these research capabilities. It also is in keeping, I believe as chairman, with the Auditor General's recommendations. So the fact that there were some unused funds – we felt it appropriate to put it on the agenda to discuss if indeed you want to utilize these funds.

Moe.

MR. AMERY: Just a question, Madam Chairman. You're talking about the existing unused funds, which is the \$18,000? Are those the existing unused funds?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, not at all. My understanding is that if we go back to our estimates in our previous budget, we'd be looking at \$8,000, which was the unused travel fund.

MR. AMERY: Eight thousand? What kind of research would you be using those funds towards?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, it would be up to the wish of the Public Accounts Committee how they wanted to utilize it. This was one suggestion of how we could.

MR. AMERY: Okay. Thank you.

MS CARLSON: I think it would be important to leave the option open to have the money available for research should the need be required as deemed by this committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Pearl Calahasen, and then Kim.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I would like to recommend that maybe rather than the unused funds being used or kept in some sort of safekeeping, we put it back into the GRF, especially at this time when we're having – we talked about the problems that we're experiencing relative to funds, and

it would really be, I think, a sign of good faith that we were giving it back to a good cause.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Kim.

MR. PHAM: Yes, Madam Chairman. I more or less think the same thing. We already have research staff working for us now, and to pay extra money for that, you know, I don't think is necessary. We should set an example by giving back these unused funds.

8:40

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Hung.
Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: I would just be repeating what was said.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Does anyone wish to introduce a motion at this time? Pearl, did you introduce a motion?

MS CALAHASEN: Yes, I will. I will introduce it as a motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Anyone wishing to speak further to the motion? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour of the motion? Against? It's been carried.

The Committee Mandate and Functions, item (b)(i), Briefing Meetings with Officials from the Treasury Department and Auditor General's Department. This also results from recommendations from . . .

Ty.

MR. LUND: Well, Madam Chairman, I believe that we agreed at the last meeting that we would do this and, as a matter of fact, had hoped that it would happen today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: As you will see, under Other Business the chair through our administrative secretary had approached the Provincial Treasurer, and we'll deal with that item when it comes up. Indeed, you're quite correct.

The area that has not been addressed and that we don't have a specific answer on is that indeed we will have briefings prior to departments. Is that correct, Corinne? We'd have to clarify that with the Provincial Treasurer.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Well, you have to get the committee to agree whether they'll allow these briefing meetings.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: With us not having the minutes before us, I would as chairman ask that we reconfirm that indeed these briefing meetings would be in order.

Ty.

MR. LUND: I would move, then, that we do invite the minister and his Treasury Department staff to our next meeting.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm referring to the briefing meetings, which is slightly different from 5(a). That has been achieved already.

MR. LUND: Well, are you talking about a meeting outside of our regular meeting?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes. It would be prior to the appearance of a minister that there would be staff briefing of this Public Accounts Committee.

MR. LUND: Well, I'm sorry, Madam Chairman. I misunderstood that. I will have to withdraw my former comments, because I thought we were talking about as part of a regular meeting. Unfortunately, I know that on my calendar I simply do not have the time when we could be setting up an extra meeting.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Anyone else wishing to speak to this item? Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: I would just echo similar comments. I think we're all making a commitment to be here at 8:30, and I believe as we proceed through this on a regular basis, the briefing updates will be more and more brief, compact, concise as we get to know the routine. Therefore, I believe it should be something that happens within the context of this meeting. We're all here, and we're all hearing the same information at the same time. I also believe that it's a little more efficient, if the Treasury Department is going to have an opportunity to speak with us, that they know where they can find us and they know when we're going to be here, and they can start scheduling around a fixed time. So I concur that we would maintain that briefing within the context of our public accounts meeting.

Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Is there any motion at this time, or do you wish to leave it just as a general discussion item? Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Could I just ask a question? I'm still not a hundred percent clear on what you're suggesting. Would this be a briefing meeting outside of our regular scheduled meetings and with officials other than the minister or the Auditor General? Or are we talking of a meeting that would take place on our regularly scheduled Wednesday mornings?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It could take place outside or during our regularly scheduled meeting, and it could be staff from the Auditor General's department or staff from the Provincial Treasurer's office, depending on what item of business was coming up on the agenda.

MR. FRIEDEL: Okay. I have no objection, if it would add to the information that we're going to need to do our work properly, if we had this sort of a meeting at our regular scheduled times. I have to agree with Ty. It's getting very, very difficult to schedule additional mornings to be here outside of Wednesdays.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Debby.

MS CARLSON: I certainly concur with those comments. If the briefing is done during our regularly scheduled time and prior to the appearance of an official, that would be fine. I think that's commendable, and we should have that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Anyone else wishing to speak to this item? Are there any motions at this time?

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: There is no motion.
Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Then if the committee finds it appropriate, I'll make a motion

that we invite staff members of either the Auditor General's department or the minister's department to meet as required and on invitation at our regularly scheduled meetings.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It would be the Provincial Treasurer's department, Gary.

Anyone wishing to speak to the motion? Ty.

MR. LUND: I'm sorry, but I didn't catch if the mover had included the Provincial Treasurer.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I was clarifying that when he said the other minister, it's the Provincial Treasurer that you're referring to.

MR. FRIEDEL: Okay. The minister or the . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Appropriate staff.

MR. FRIEDEL: I'm not sure if it would be necessary, though, that the Auditor General himself be here; his staff could be apart from him. To clarify my motion, it would mean that the minister would be here with his staff.

MR. BRUSEKER: Why don't we meet in camera?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, you'd have to move it. I mean, we can't be approached to do something . . . But we have a motion before us at this time.

Anyone else wishing to speak further to the motion? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour of the motion? Against? The motion has been carried.

Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: I move that we move in camera for a five-minute discussion, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Anyone wishing to speak to moving in camera?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any against? If not, we'll enter in camera.

[The committee met in camera from 8:47 to 8:52]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We're now back.

MR. VASSEUR: Can I make a motion, Madam Chairman, that we complete today the agenda as set out on the previous organizational agenda.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on the motion? Ed.

MR. STELMACH: Madam Chairman, we don't need a motion for that. I mean, we're here - we don't need a motion to complete the agenda. We just carry on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would agree with you. Yes.

Anyone wishing to speak further to the item that's before us, which is Establishment of Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure? I'm recommending that a subcommittee, which would consist of myself and the deputy chairman, work with Corinne to pull together the agendas. I'd like to have input from our deputy chairman on agendas. What's the wish?

DR. L. TAYLOR: I'll move that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's been moved by Lorne. Any discussion? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour? Against? It's been carried unanimously.

Information. On this I'll ask Corinne to speak to Standing Order 112 with regards to media attendance at meetings so that we have it quite clear.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Basically, Standing Order 112 states that the chairman has the authority to allow media in meetings. In the past media have requested to come into meetings with their cameras. It's basically up to the chairman and the committee. That was an information point only.

MR. LUND: Well, Madam Chairman, I would encourage the media to attend our meetings and certainly would move that they be open to the media. The only thing that I would request is that if TV cameras do come in here, they can't be coming in and out while the meeting is in progress. If they come in, they can stay as long as they want, but once they go out, they cannot come back in.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other comments? Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: I just have a concern if proper coverage or explanation of this type of meeting is not - it might look to somebody watching on television that, you know, a third of the House is here and most of us are asleep. [interjection] Or on time then.

If you understand what I'm saying, I just have a concern that if the media is going to be invited in, there has to be some recognition of what type of committee this is and the hour it's being conducted and the size of our committee so it doesn't reflect poorly on all of us that there's just a few of us here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sorry. There's isn't a motion before us, is there?

MR. LUND: Yes, I moved one. I'm sorry, Madam Chairman, but I did move that . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. I take it as a motion then. The question has been called. All in favour? Against? It's been carried.

Moving to item (b)(iv), Agreement for Notices of Motions as Standing Agenda Items. This I put on. I wanted to know whether there was a desire to have notices of motions as an agenda item, so if there's some business that is not being dealt with in that meeting, you do have the prerogative to give notice that you will be entering it onto the next agenda.

Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Madam Chairman, I believe that probably the rules of our Standing Orders apply equally well under committee, so I don't think it's necessary.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Moving on, I would ask Corinne to speak to the annual report, what's happened in the past. I believe there isn't a legal requirement, but we do do an annual report.

MRS. DACYSHYN: That's correct. Basically, the chairman is correct. There is no requirement by Standing Orders at the present time for this committee to report to the House. Two years ago the chairman asked for the committee's concurrence to write such a report. It's very short, basically outlining the meetings of the committee as well as the conferences that certain committee members attended. That's it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Any questions? Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: Just a question on the cost of producing the annual report in the past.

MRS. DACYSHYN: There's no cost involved other than photocopying of the report. It's not printed anywhere. Basically, I produce it, I type it, and I photocopy and distribute it. There's no real cost involved.

MRS. BURGNER: Then my second question, if I may, is its circulation.

MRS. DACYSHYN: In the last two years I simply circulated it to all members of the House as well as the Auditor General and other interested parties that receive the transcripts of these committee meetings.

MRS. BURGNER: Just a question of clarification. I'm not sure of the normal circulation of reports from the House, but would this possibly be sent to libraries and all across the . . .

MRS. DACYSHYN: There are two or three Alberta libraries on the list as well as the Legislature Library. Any report that's tabled in the House the Legislature Library has as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: For example, as chairman I certainly have been receiving public accounts from other provinces for information.

Pearl.

MS CALAHASEN: Could I just move, then, we go according to the former practice.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. There's a motion before us that we continue former practice. The question's been called. All in favour? Against? Are you against?

MR. MAGNUS: No.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just a little bit slow. It's carried.

Moving on to Scheduling of Auditor General for Review of Auditor General's Report, 1991-92. Corinne, do you want to bring us up to date as to where we're at with regards to the release of the public accounts?

MRS. DACYSHYN: In the past the committee meetings have been held in this manner, where there's been an organizational meeting and the committee has usually asked the Auditor General to appear for two meetings following the organizational meeting to discuss the recommendations and answer questions on his report and the public accounts. Then there was a list struck by the committee of ministers, who appeared following that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other questions to Corinne? What's the wish of the committee? Do you wish the deputy chairman or myself to work with administration on the scheduling, or do you want full input?

Ty.

MR. LUND: Just for clarification, did I hear that the Auditor General would not be available again next . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, he wasn't available for today.

MR. LUND: But he would be available next . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: He will be available next week, yes.

MR. LUND: Well, then I would move that we schedule the Auditor General for October 6.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just a point. If we agree on 5(a), Ty, we've actually scheduled the Provincial Treasurer for October 6. The Auditor General will be present at that meeting, but it would be the Provincial Treasurer's agenda time.

MR. LUND: Yes, I appreciate that. However, we already know that the Provincial Treasurer has difficulty with our time frame. Let's plan on having him start his presentation on the 13th.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Who on the 13th?

MR. LUND: The Provincial Treasurer.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: On the 13th? But he's agreed to October 6 because it accommodated his schedule.

MR. LUND: It's been my experience here that the comments - what happens with the Auditor General, if it precludes the other departments, it seems to work better. Now, I know that we're talking about the Provincial Treasurer coming with his officials, so it may be somewhat different than we've done in the past. I'm not sure. But it is important that the Auditor General be very early in the process.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to bring to your attention that Mr. Dinning would be coming and playing the same role as what the Auditor General did at the last. It's purely information and a briefing for this Public Accounts Committee. That's my understanding from the letter that we communicated by.

MR. LUND: I would amend my motion, then, to read:
that the Auditor General, along with the Provincial Treasurer and his officials, be requested to be at our next meeting.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is that agreed? Pearl.

MS CALAHASEN: On that issue, Madam Chairman, if we can also include that the Auditor General will then follow the Provin-

cial Treasurer so that we can deal with the Auditor General's report.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: This would be on the 13th?

MS CALAHASEN: Yes, and maybe two days there, because it takes some time to go through the report. It would be very fruitful for us, I think, to have at least two days scheduled for that, but that might come under scheduling.

9:02

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So would you agree to that addition, Ty, that we'd schedule the Auditor General specifically for the 13th, including him being in attendance October 6?

MR. LUND: I agree.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Any further discussion? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour? Against? It's been carried.

Now, we need still to further deal with 5(a). It's been recommended by Corinne that we indeed attempt to do some scheduling for the Provincial Treasurer and the cabinet ministers beyond the 13th. That's been recommended at this time as well so that we can lay out our calendar. Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Do we have any idea of the ministers' schedules, or are we just going on the basis of putting names on a list and hoping they might show up?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, we don't. If members of the committee have a preference which area you would like to appear before . . . Lorne.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I thought we had a subcommittee here. Why can't the subcommittee look into that and report back to this committee? They can contact the ministers, and then they can report back.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you want to move that?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Sure. That'll give you and Gary a chance to get together.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Any discussion? Sounds interesting. All in favour? Against? It's been carried.

Speaking to 5(a), I believe, Jocelyn, you had some comments earlier on the agenda about 5(a).

MRS. BURGNER: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to identify the problem of 10:15 a.m. I understand that your caucus starts at 10 o'clock. I'm wondering, if the minister actually needs an hour, whether we want to make provisions to meet a little later, or if in fact he could contain his remarks to 45 minutes or somehow deal with that 10 o'clock issue.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: As chairman I certainly wasn't going to question that. The Provincial Treasurer had indicated in his letter that he would be available for an hour between 9:15 and 10:15 a.m. I thought that with the Provincial Treasurer offering an hour of his time for this committee, it was important that we accept it.

MRS. BURGNER: Further to that, would you be able to get release from your caucus meeting to stay 15 minutes?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. BURGNER: Then my other question would be: would it not be possible for us to delay the start of this meeting by 15 minutes?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's open to the wishes of the body.
Debby.

MS CARLSON: I think that accommodating the Provincial Treasurer's time is far more important than us making some accommodation for our caucus meeting. I think that if he's available from 9:15 to 10:15, then we as a committee should be available for him.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do we have agreement that we do meet to 10:15 a.m.? We can deal with what time we start after we've dealt with this. Is there any disagreement that we adjourn at 10:15 next week? If not, that's agreed.

Jocelyn has brought forward a 15-minute delay in calling us to order, to 8:45 a.m. What are the wishes? Debby.

MS CARLSON: What will happen prior to the Provincial Treasurer coming at 9:15 next week? What items will we deal with?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: As Corinne is suggesting, her understanding was that we could actually start the meeting at 9:15, not even 8:45, if there weren't other agenda items that we had to deal with at that time.

Barry, and then Gary.

MR. McFARLAND: Just so I'm understanding this, 9:15 to 10:15 a.m. would be the time slot for the Provincial Treasurer?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's right.

MR. McFARLAND: But in addition to that, according to the Member for Rocky Mountain House we're going to have the Auditor General here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's correct.

MR. McFARLAND: Would it not be worth our while to start the meeting at the regular time and have the Auditor General begin his report? You know, this delaying it 15 minutes I don't think is a concern for the Liberal caucus, because they may very well by showing up at 10:15 actually be on time for their caucus meeting.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Your point's well made.

MR. McFARLAND: No, no. The point is if we could use the time more efficiently by having the Auditor General here at our regularly scheduled time and then at 9:15 switch over to the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. FRIEDEL: I'd say just about exactly what Barry said.

MR. McFARLAND: I mean, I don't want to be bopping back and forth on times all the time. We've got the time set; let's go with it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. So unless there's an indication that there is any disagreement, we will be starting at 8:30 a.m. and

adjourning at 10:15 next week. It's agreed to. We know the date of the next meeting, and if you move that we stand . . . Sorry. Ed?

MR. STELMACH: A motion to adjourn.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 9:08 a.m.]