

8:30 a.m.

February 22, 1995

[Chairman: Mrs. Abdurahman]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Public Accounts meeting to order, please.

The first item of business is to extend a warm welcome to new members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Mr. Sine Chadi, Mr. Terry Kirkland, Mr. Pham, Mr. Nick Taylor, and Mr. Julius Yankowsky.

At this time I would also like to acknowledge the great loss of a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, that gentle, caring individual, Mr. Harry Sohal. So I'd ask you, please, if you would bow your heads and have a minute of silence in respect and reflection on the life of Harry.

God bless Harry and keep him in His care. Amen.

Could I have approval of the agenda, please? Moved by Sine. Seconded by Moe. All in favour? I'll dispense with seconders in the committee, so we just need a mover.

MR. MAGNUS: I can't hear you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry.

MR. MAGNUS: I can't hear you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm very sorry. I've got the flu actually and I'm losing my voice, so you'll have to bear with me. Some people will think that's a blessing.

MR. N. TAYLOR: If it's not your voice, it's your accent.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm being accused of all sorts of things, so I can see I'm off to a really good start for this new session.

It's been moved by Sine that we adopt the agenda circulated. Any debate?

MR. COUTTS: Is there is a doctor in the House?

THE CHAIRMAN: I left him at home. All in favour of adoption of the agenda?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Against? It's agreed.

For the benefit of those who have just come in, I'd like to extend a warm welcome once again to Mr. Julius Yankowsky and Mr. Pham, being new members of the Public Accounts Committee.

As you know, this is the organizational meeting as this is the first Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the new session. I'd like at this time to just draw to your attention that under Standing Order 50 it clearly leaves out the powers of the Public Accounts Committee and those of the chairman. I'd like to express at this time that certainly as chairman of the Public Accounts committee in the research I've done since becoming a Member of the Legislative Assembly and the information shared through the Auditor General's department, I would continue to recommend and encourage us adopting the recommendations of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' guidelines. All members have received copies of that during past Public Accounts meetings. As for new members, I believe they were circulated by Corinne as part of their agenda.

With those comments, are there any questions at this time? Sine.

MR. CHADI: Well, Madam Chairman, you know I appreciate the work you do with the Public Accounts Committee and how seriously you take the job as chairperson of it.

AN HON. MEMBER: Can't hear.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you turn up the volume, please? We're having difficulty hearing.

AN HON. MEMBER: Actually, the light isn't on either.

THE CHAIRMAN: Your light's on now, Sine.

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. My light is on now. [interjections] Were you suggesting that the light was on but nobody home?

AN HON. MEMBER: Sine, could you put something on top of your head? It's glancing off it.

MR. CHADI: That's why you assumed the light was on.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd ask you please not to get me laughing too much or I really will not be able to speak.

MR. CHADI: I was going to say a knock, knock joke, but now I won't, Madam Chairman.

We appreciate the work you do as chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and how seriously you take your role as chairperson of this committee. I know from being a past member of the Public Accounts Committee that you want this committee to expand its role to make it an effective committee. I understand and remember clearly the words you've said, Madam Chairperson, that you want to put some teeth in this committee. In fact, I believe it was in the last term of the Public Accounts Committee when we actually voted on a motion to approve this committee's proceeding with the guidelines of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees. I would like at this point in time to make a motion

that we adopt the guidelines of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and become more in line with what's happening across Canada.

Let's bring Alberta into a new century here, a new year, a new era. Things are happening and happening fast here in this province, for the better, I hope, and of course this committee can make that for the better.

I would like to now have my motion stand.

THE CHAIRMAN: Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes, Madam Chairman. We did in fact debate this at least twice, if not three times. In September of 1993, I recall, and in February of 1994 we debated this very same thing. I made the point at that time, as did other members of the committee, that we were quite capable of making a made-in-Alberta regulation and authority as to how this committee would operate. The motion at that time to adopt the Canadian council's guidelines was rejected, and I'm speaking against it. I will be voting against it again for the same reasons.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Gary.
Richard.

MR. MAGNUS: I'm just going to reiterate what Gary has to say. I've been on this committee since this session began, and frankly

we've debated this twice now. I think we're wasting the committee's time. I'm going to vote against it as well.

MR. KIRKLAND: Madam Chairman, as a rookie here, I missed those previous debates the hon. members speak of. What is the real opposition to adopting the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' guidelines? I've missed that, and I have to apologize. I haven't read the past minutes which indicate the downside of embracing something like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would any members wish to address the question?

MR. FRIEDEL: I don't want to go into it at length. In both cases we had a fairly extensive debate on it. Seeing it on the agenda, I took the liberty of checking *Hansard* for the two meetings involved. There are two and three pages respectively of debate at the time. If you wish, September 29, 1993, and February 16, 1994, were the dates when those meetings were held.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I also knew . . . Well, it was recycled way back. But I just wonder if anybody could tell me how many provinces follow the Canadian council and how many do it on their own. In other words, are we the odd boy out or does everybody else do their own? How many provinces follow these rules and how many don't?

THE CHAIRMAN: From the information I've acquired over the past two years, not all provinces have adopted a hundred percent all the recommendations. The majority of the provinces, other than two, have certainly adopted the majority of the recommendations.

MR. N. TAYLOR: So you can pick and choose the cherries out of them, can you?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

8:40

MR. N. TAYLOR: But the government has laid on the whip and said no cherries at all. Is that . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you'd have to ask the government members that, Mr. Taylor.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I see.

MR. FRIEDEL: I'm sorry; I didn't hear what he said.

THE CHAIRMAN: He was being facetious, I believe. Mr. Taylor.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I was wondering. The chairman has said that the provinces can pick and choose if they don't follow everything, and it sounds to me from what you've said that the government has laid on the whip and said no picking cherries at all, we don't want anything to do with it, we'll just do our own. Is that it?

MR. FRIEDEL: We don't have a Whip.

MR. N. TAYLOR: You don't have a Whip?

MR. FRIEDEL: I can assure you that the Whip has nothing to do with . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: Well, take a vote. We'll find out whether it's laid on.

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. Mr. Friedel has the floor, Mr. Taylor.

MR. FRIEDEL: I can assure you that the Whip has nothing to do with the decision we made the last time. He may be concerned as to whether people are in attendance, but what we discuss and the decisions we make are entirely our own, and we did go through this at quite some length. There was debate on meeting outside session times. The cost and such related was taken into consideration, and we defeated both motions to that effect. I still feel very strongly that we don't need the Canadian council to tell us how and why and when and the rules under which this committee should operate. I think we're quite capable of doing that on our own initiative.

THE CHAIRMAN: Nick. Let the record show it was Mr. Nick Taylor.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I guess I could have gone back and read all the *Hansards*, but if there are a number of recommendations . . . I was just interested, as is Terry – you know, what's so wrong about the Canadian council? I know them that easterners might be out to get us, but that shouldn't be enough reason. Saying that we're capable of running it ourselves also means that we're capable of adopting a national standard, and I was just wondering what was wrong with the national standard. I don't understand it. What were they recommending that we don't want to do?

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm going to go in the order of hands as they went up.

Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I think one of the discussions we had, to bring some of my colleagues up to speed, dealt with the fact that the quarterly statement process the Provincial Treasurer has put into place now does affect our ability to have accurate information in front of us on a more regular and timely basis, the fact that our public accounts are available to us. Those were some of the issues that allowed us to look at the issues from an Alberta perspective. The other thing is that we are completely free in this committee, using the Auditor General's report and the estimates documents, to ask incisive questions that go into detail.

The sooner we get off this item and on to other matters of substance, I would appreciate it. I've got valuable time, and this is just a rehash.

THE CHAIRMAN: Barry McFarland.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm speaking against the motion as some colleagues here have in the past. I don't profess to want to follow a standard routine that some other out-of-touch council may have adopted for a few of the other provinces. I think we've got an ideal opportunity here along with the Auditor General to ask questions of various departments. As the Member for Calgary-Currie indicated, I think we're reporting in quite a different fashion than many of the other provinces may report their information. I guess if I had to be honest with myself, I have quite a bit of difficulty dealing with information that's 18 months old anyway and under constant change under the direction of the Auditor General. I think we're doing our own thing in a

very reasonable and responsive manner, and if I had my way, we wouldn't have a Public Accounts Committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: Richard Magnus.

MR. MAGNUS: I've already spoken, Madam Chairman, but I'll speak again.

THE CHAIRMAN: You put your hand up, and I thought you were wanting to speak once again.

MR. MAGNUS: I think I was stretching. It is early, Madam Chairman.

If it's not broke, don't fix it. We've been doing this this way for a couple of years now. It seems to work as well as it can work, and again, why change it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Carol Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's been said.

THE CHAIRMAN: Peter Sekulic.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm just wondering if I could pose a question to the Auditor General: his comments on the discrepancy or the difference between what we're currently operating under and that which Mr. Chadi's motion recommends. I think an objective third-party point of view – perhaps "party" is the wrong word to use – an objective point of view would be refreshing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you like to address this question, Mr. Wingate?

MR. WINGATE: Right. I think the biggest difference between Public Accounts committees elsewhere and in Alberta is that it's the size of the membership. In Alberta we have a very large number of members; in other provinces it ranges between about nine and 12 members. Here we used to have 21, I believe, and it's now down to 17.

Excuse my cold, by the way.

MR. SEKULIC: Could we have just a quick comment on the scope and the powers of the other authorities in comparison with that found in Alberta?

MR. WINGATE: I think the scope of the deliberations of the Public Accounts Committee in Alberta is very similar to matters that are discussed elsewhere in other provinces. This question of size is quite an important factor, because when you have a large number of people, the debate tends to follow party political lines rather than looking at the issues involved. The smaller the group the more concerned people are to roll up their sleeves and deal with the issues involved. I think that's fair comment. That's the experience of other jurisdictions, that a small group really does encourage focus and attention to detail, whereas with a larger group there's a tendency to get into debating issues along broadly party political lines.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Terry Kirkland.

MR. KIRKLAND: Madam Chairman, just so I can in fact solidify this in my mind. I've heard the opposition to this particular

motion, being that we have to submit a quarterly report. There is a concern that it's a duplication of questioning of ministers because we have that opportunity in other venues and it's a standard routine. On that last point, I understood the earlier comments that you can accept any parts of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' guidelines to apply to your particular province without, I think, destroying the intent of it. The last concern by the Auditor General, as I understood it, was just the cumbersome aspect of the committee, and certainly I can see a committee of 17 being that.

I guess I view this a little differently than the government members. There is never enough time to ask questions of any minister. It's a very large task, as we all know, and it's a very large task, I'm sure, on behalf of the ministers to defend the many questions that come forth. The intention of the questions, as I see it, is simply to present a good, open picture to all Albertans. So I would really set aside that concern. We talk about open government, and this is an extension of that. So I would have to support the motion if the points that have been raised to this time in the debate are simply those four points. I can't speak at length about having knowledge of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, but I understand there's a fair bit of flexibility to adopt what would be required. So I would speak in favour of the motion at this point.

THE CHAIRMAN: Gary Friedel.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. I'd like to make one observation. About a year and a half ago, give or take a couple of months, we did debate the matter of the number of members. I would remind committee members that this committee does not choose the numbers; this must be done through the Parliamentary Reform Committee. That's how it was reduced from 21 to 17. I'm sure that if that committee chose to reduce the number even further, there would be no end of volunteers to exit the committee, possibly from both sides. The matter of questioning ministers and the Auditor General is basically what we do. We spend all our time other than at the organizational meeting doing just that. I don't know how you can change the system of the meeting where we could ask more questions other than extend the time, and we certainly voted that down because of the cost of traveling to and from Edmonton out of session. Also, because of the guaranteed spring and fall session, we had decided it was quite possible through the period of each year to ask each minister and their senior staff to attend here and be on the hot seat, so to speak, at least once during a budget or a financial statement year. As long as there are no changes in the session period, we should quite comfortably be able to continue to do that.

8:50

MR. MAGNUS: Question, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Barry. I have to acknowledge Barry McFarland, and then Sine Chadi can close debate.

MR. McFARLAND: Madam Chairman, I just want to clarify a comment made by – as I perceived it, anyway – the Member for Leduc. If I recall his words, he said he felt there was opposition to this Public Accounts Committee because of quarterly reports, and I don't think the Member for Calgary-Currie said that at all. What I do believe she said, at least what I heard, was that because this government is now reporting quarterly, it makes information accessible that much quicker and we can do the job more efficiently. I don't and didn't myself – and I hope *Hansard* indicates it

– perceive that to be in opposition to Public Accounts because we're now reporting quarterly.

MR. WINGATE: Another point I'd like to make is that this Public Accounts Committee debates the earliest public accounts in Canada, and that is a significant advantage. The earlier the information gets to the Public Accounts Committee, the more relevant that information is. That, I think, is a significant achievement.

THE CHAIRMAN: Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to draw my colleague's attention to the minutes and documentation circulated prior to the meeting with respect to the schedule of standing committee meetings over September '93 right through to November '94. It would appear that close to 16 ministries, in addition to meetings with the Auditor General, were given a venue for discussion. Last time I counted, that pretty well covers the whole shot. So I don't feel any additional meetings and further scrutiny are required. Quite frankly, as my colleague the vice-chairman said, we do have a guaranteed sitting agreement between the fall and the spring session, we have downsized government so there aren't that many ministries, and if you do your homework and review your material, you can bring some pretty key questions to an hour and a half discussion with the minister and their department. I think it's important that Albertans understand that we have covered that serious scrutiny with some thoroughness since the past election. I just draw my colleagues' attention to pages 2 and 3 of Mr. Hierath's report.

THE CHAIRMAN: The mover to close debate. Sine.

MR. CHADI: Madam Chairman, after sitting here listening to the comments made, I'm wondering if we shouldn't now be making recommendations to the Canadian council to get the council to change their guidelines to correspond with ours perhaps. You know, that might be a thought.

Nick Taylor, I think, said it right when he suggested that perhaps what we should be looking at is the cherries. We don't have to accept all recommendations, but we can accept the ones that fit within what we want to do and what we're doing. If there's insistence that in fact nothing should be accepted and in fact we're running and functioning the way we are in a productive manner, then I think we're missing out on something. I think we should be looking at those cherries. Pick out the plums, and then go from there.

Madam Chairman, there are differences in what we're doing with respect to public accounts in comparison to other provinces, and I would like to think that sooner rather than later we would start to adopt some of those recommendations. I sense that a carrying on of closing debate isn't going to make much difference, Madam Chairman, so I'm going to close debate now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Debate's been closed. All in favour of the motion moved? Against? The motion is lost.

Moving on to 3(c), Committee Funding, this is for information. The approved budget estimates '95-96 have been included as attached to the agenda. You will note there's no provision for out-of-session committee meetings, and also part of the budget addresses the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' conference in Ottawa. At this time also I would note, and it's been mentioned already, that the report by Ron Hierath, MLA,

chairman of the Legislative Offices Committee who attended the last conference, has also been attached to the agenda. As chairman of Public Accounts, I certainly want to acknowledge the report done by Mr. Hierath and commend him for it. I didn't want to influence debate, but I feel he brought forward some very pertinent points from attending that conference and also brought forward the recommendations that were adopted at that last Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' meeting. I believe it was in Prince Edward Island. So if you have not had time to peruse the information he sent, I would encourage you to do that and then put it in light of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' recommendations. I think then you would see the difference between what our Public Accounts does and what happens in other parts of Canada.

Moving on to 3(d), there are within the budget moneys made available for attendance at the Ottawa conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees. We need a motion at this time whether we follow the practice of last year where no member, whether it be administration or elected official from Public Accounts, goes. Last year the decision was that we did not send anyone. Within the budget this year there is an allotment for two members, I believe, Corinne.

MRS. DACYSHYN: One. Just one member.

THE CHAIRMAN: So what's the wish? Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Madam Chairman, in light of restraints and such, I would move that we refrain from sending any member to the annual conference.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's open for debate. Anyone wishing to speak to the motion? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour of the motion that we do not send anyone? Against? It's carried.

Moving on to 3(d), Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report on First and Second Sessions of the 23rd Legislature. We have a draft attached. I need a motion of approval of that draft. It would become our report for the first two sessions. Could I have a motion to accept it as drafted?

MR. CHADI: I move.

THE CHAIRMAN: Moved by Sine. Any discussion? If not, all in favour? Against? It's been carried unanimously.

For your information, 3(e). There was a motion passed by the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act on February 1. Any comments from anyone on that committee or any discussion at this time, or will we just receive it as information?

Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Maybe I'll just make one observation. The way I understand it, although it looks like they've turned over some of the responsibility of this committee, I gather it only involves one meeting when we have in attendance the minister responsible for the heritage savings trust fund and that we would allocate some time during that particular questioning meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: My understanding would be that it hasn't reached that level of approval yet for it to be referred here. It has still to go through the next process.

Carol, would you like to . . .

MS HALEY: Well, it was a motion that was brought forward for discussion at the heritage savings trust fund in an attempt to save

people's time, that maybe the two committees could be merged into one. But there's a long, long way to go before that ever happens. In large part it will depend on the review going on for the heritage savings trust fund right now, plus it would require a change in legislation to even accommodate it.

9:00

THE CHAIRMAN: That was my understanding. Thank you.
Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: The point I was trying to make, though, is: if it adds a considerable burden to this committee other than what I anticipate from these minutes, I think we should take the opportunity to debate it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to debate it at this time?

MR. FRIEDEL: No, not now. But if the time comes when it appears it would change the intent, I guess, and the complexity of the operation of this committee, at that time we would want to ensure that we have some input.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Moving on to the organizational part of the committee meetings, the dates and times of committee meetings are, I believe, set, or do we need a motion? Could I have a motion to confirm that we meet every Wednesday within session from 8:30 to 10 a.m.?

MR. KIRKLAND: So moved, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Moved by Terry. Any discussion? If not, all in favour? Against? I take it silence means you're unanimously supporting this. It's been carried.

Scope of Questions by Members is open for discussion. This is the time if you want to change past practices. The chair has been fairly permissive.

MR. CHADI: I just want to ask the chair if you could perhaps tell us what you mean by the scope of questions by members.

THE CHAIRMAN: Past practice has been that the questions stay within the scope of the minister or the Auditor General appearing before you. We've been fairly permissive over the past two sessions when indeed some questions did get into policy, and it was coming from all members. So there was certainly no ruling out of order of that. Indeed, sometimes the questions actually dealt with issues that were before us at the present time. They weren't always dealing with past decision-making. That was what was happening certainly in the last session. As I say, it was coming from not only Official Opposition members; it was coming from government members likewise.

Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I think it's important that in light of the half-hour discussion previously about the length of time we spend and the lack of time to scrutinize government, we should be very focused in our questions and make sure policy issues are not what we discuss or that we not spend time discussing what is currently before us in the House. The idea is to review the past expenditures, and we should be focused on that. Given that this item is on the agenda and some clarification has been sought, I think it's important that you as chairman reaffirm that we have a process and we stick to it, because if the concern we've just had is that we don't have enough scrutiny, then

it comes from the fact that our questions may not be as pertinent and focused as they should be.

THE CHAIRMAN: What's the wish of the majority?

MR. KIRKLAND: Madam Chairman, this is a point of clarification. I'm reading from the committee here that they're quite comfortable with your chairing of past sessions and the latitude you indicated you gave in some instances. Though certainly Jocelyn's comments that we should remain focused are well made, I understand that past practice has been quite acceptable.

MR. FRIEDEL: Elaborating on what Jocelyn said and perhaps answering Terry's concern, the intent of Public Accounts is to do just that: to address questions related to public accounts. We have in the past occasionally strayed, but we've also challenged on a number of occasions questions that have delved into policy and current affairs rather than public accounts. I think we would want to stay on the stream of what we did in the past: to restrict questions generally to the public accounts at hand, and not only that but the ones that were most recently available to us, and that it doesn't stray too far.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Gary.
Richard.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess in the first half hour of this meeting we talked about the powers of the committee and whether we should go to a Canadian model. The entire argument I heard from the Liberal side of the House, and as a matter of fact one of the things the Auditor General said, is that by going to this we would become more focused. Everybody was arguing the question of becoming more focused. Well, I'd suggest we do exactly that and eliminate the latitude we've had in the past. Dwell on public accounts rather than policy. This is not a policy committee. We've got policy committees all over the place, and why we would start entertaining thoughts of getting into policy in this committee is beyond me. I'm totally in favour of becoming more focused on what we are here to do, and that's what your side was arguing about for the first half hour of this meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just to make it quite clear, I don't think there's been any suggestion that we get into policy. What the chair indicated on the occasion was that on both sides you were indeed getting into policy. There was no objection from the minister and there were no objections from the members on this. If you wish the chair to rule rigidly, I can certainly do that.

MR. MAGNUS: Madam Chairman, that's exactly what I'm saying.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Sine.

MR. CHADI: Madam Chairman, being a member of the class of '93 – and I've been part of Public Accounts since I was elected, and I know that many of the MLAs sitting on this committee have been here about the same time – we never strayed into policy unless we needed explanation of the policy which related to the expenditure. It had nothing to do with policy. I think what you've been doing and the way you've been chairing it and the way you've been conducting the questions to the ministers – the ministers certainly didn't object to them in any way. In fact, they even went on and explained more so than we even asked most

times. I don't know why we're even debating at this point in time. I think the way you've been going about it is the proper fashion, and I'd like to see it stay that way. I don't know how you can change it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Peter and then Terry.

MR. SEKULIC: Yes, Madam Chairman. I pray to God that none of my constituents read this debate. Status quo in this instance is working fine. There weren't any problems in Public Accounts sessions when I was here, and I hope we can continue and in fact end this debate and get on.

MR. KIRKLAND: It was my intention, Madam Chairman, to indicate that I didn't hear anybody suggest we move into policy, but I intended to move that we embrace the past practices of the chair for the upcoming Public Accounts session.

THE CHAIRMAN: There is a motion before Public Accounts. Is there anyone wishing to enter into debate?

Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: I hesitate to comment that it sounds like I'm opposed to the chairman having some latitude, but I think the motion is too general and vague. There has been an assortment of actions taking place, but I also recall there were a number of challenges to questions asked that strayed from what we felt Public Accounts was all about. I think that unless that motion was very specific as to a focus direction, I would be voting against it.

MR. KIRKLAND: Okay. A friendly amendment, if I might, just to bring the debate to a close. I would move that in fact the main scope of Public Accounts be to review past expenditures of government, and unless the minister moves into policy, we will stay focused on that. All I'm trying to do is bring the debate to a close, and it seems you're all comfortable with what's gone on in the past. I guess I'm suggesting status quo. That probably doesn't clarify it very well for your satisfaction, so if you want to help me out with the words, I'd be more than willing to embrace it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you withdrawing your first motion and rewording your motion?

MR. KIRKLAND: That's probably the quickest, but as a rookie here, perhaps I'm not choosing the correct words to satisfy the committee so they can get on with life. I'll be very open to withdrawing the motion, have somebody that is more experienced than I put the motion forth, and bring the debate to a close. I think we're wasting time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you like to read the motion before? We need to know what we're voting on. I mean, that's important.

MR. FRIEDEL: There appear to be two motions before us, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: He has withdrawn the first one.

MS HALEY: Excuse me. I'm not comfortable with the second one.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, let's hear it so we know what it is. Would you wish to restate what it is you're moving?

9:10

MR. KIRKLAND: Well, as I was saying, I was looking for some assistance from this committee. I understand what you're attempting to capture. I'm not putting it in the words to make you all comfortable. I'm just attempting to bring the debate to a close. The status quo has existed. If there is a need for a motion in this particular instance, then let's have one. The wording I chose obviously wasn't very comfortable to one and all, and I would step aside to let somebody put a motion forth to simply bring it to a close.

MS HALEY: The only focus of this committee is past accounts. It has absolutely no jurisdiction or need to get into policy. His motion indicated that our main focus should be past accounts, but if a minister wants to go off into policy, we can go there with him. No.

THE CHAIRMAN: The motion I'm sensing is that all questions would be focused on past expenditures.

MR. N. TAYLOR: On a point of order. Do we need a motion? The committee's already set up with its powers.

MS HALEY: That's right. Well, your member wanted the motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: As a point of clarification, this is the administration organizational meeting, and past practice has been that you set the mandate of your meeting at this organizational meeting. The scope of the questions is a key component of that. In the past it was past practice.

MR. FRIEDEL: Just to clarify that a bit, we should indicate that it is the most recent edition of the public accounts and also the Auditor General's report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Terry, are you comfortable in moving a motion based on the discussion, or do you wish to . . .

MR. KIRKLAND: Well, did Carol have a motion that came forth?

THE CHAIRMAN: There's been no other motion that came forward.

MR. YANKOWSKY: I'm prepared to make a motion if Terry is withdrawing his motion.

MR. KIRKLAND: Which I did.

THE CHAIRMAN: He's withdrawn it.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Okay. I would like to move that the Public Accounts Committee questions be within the scope of the ministry without excursions into policy.

THE CHAIRMAN: There's a motion before us. Do you wish to speak to it, Julius?

MS HALEY: I think it needs a little more clarification on what is before us and not leaving it open to suggest that we can go off into the future or beyond the most recent public accounts books.

THE CHAIRMAN: So the motion would be that you deal specifically with the Auditor General's report that's the most up to

date and also the public accounts volumes that are pertinent to that session. Is that what you're looking for, Carol?

MS HALEY: Yes. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. That's the intent of your motion, Julius?

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes. I will change it to whatever is necessary to include that.

THE CHAIRMAN: And we'd not move into the area of policy.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Could we have that read back, please?

MR. CHADI: Madam Chairman, before you read that back, I think I want some clarification as well, simply because many times the ministers before us and the people the ministers bring along with them stray into areas so they can explain. If you're going to shut them down, I think that would be wrong. They explain what and how this expenditure had come in. I would suggest to us here, all this committee today, that our questioning would be related to the expenditures. However the minister answers, it's up to him. You're not going to say: no, Mr. Minister, you can't say that.

THE CHAIRMAN: What I've done in the past is that when I felt we were straying into policy I sought direction from the membership, and there certainly have not been objections in the past.

MS HALEY: The motion is with regard to our questioning. It is not defining the parameters of the answer a minister or the people he or she brings with them can give. Let's not try and define what the answer is going to be; let's just define the question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you read the motion, Corinne? This is the motion that's before us at this time.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Moved by Mr. Yankowsky that the scope of questions in Public Accounts Committee meetings be limited to the most recent Auditor General's report and public accounts and that questions would not move into policy issues.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any further debate? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour? Against? It's been carried.

Moving to 4(c), Number and Order of Questions by Members. What I have been doing as chair is alternating who starts the questions – if it would be a member of the Official Opposition one week, it would be a member of government the following week – and to the best of my ability we've gone backwards and forwards. On the odd occasion depending on the numbers, depending on how many members have been here, you may have got two government members following each other. In other words, what I was doing was using my discretion. If someone was getting into a second or third question and someone had no questions, I was trying to be fair. That's how it was done before. We also had the main question with two supplementaries. I tried to ensure that the supplementaries were tied to the main question, and that worked fairly well. So that was past practice under 4(c).

MR. McFARLAND: Madam Chairman, this really hasn't to do with the questions you've asked, but just for my own curiosity.

Are we to address each other as "Member for" or by a first name? It's not a big deal, but I just want to know what the rules are. I prefer to call you Madam Chairman. I don't know if I'm supposed to call you Muriel. If I call you Madam Chairman, it seems a little contradictory to refer to Terry not as Terry but as the Member for Leduc, while at the same time I have to wear a suit and tie in the morning. Let's be consistent.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, this is a committee. You can come in with the appropriate attire in the Chamber.

MR. McFARLAND: But if we can call each other by a first name, why can't we wear jeans and a shirt?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, in my understanding past practice was that we were referred to by our names, not by a member representing so and so. That has been historically the pattern, and I've tried to follow that. From what I could see from *Hansard*, the chair was referred to as the chair, not first names or "the Member for."

MR. McFARLAND: So your preference is to address each other by a first name or something.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Unless I have direction that you prefer to be called Ms or Mr., I will continue to try Mr. Kirkland, Terry, or Mr. McFarland, Barry.

MR. McFARLAND: But we still have to wear the monkey suit.

THE CHAIRMAN: The direction from the Speaker is indeed that we have to have appropriate dress within the Chamber.
Dr. Lorne Taylor.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, I can speak on that. The Speaker has ruled quite clearly in my case that dress jeans, which is traditional western-style dress, are inappropriate in the House. Now, I felt that was discriminatory and wrote him a memo back saying that, but unfortunately he ruled against me again. So you cannot wear jeans. And as for calling you Barry, I'd say it's certainly better than a lot of things I've heard you called.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm tempted to rule him out of order, but I see we've still got smiles on our faces.

One of the things we could do and I've been looking for is if we could actually have Public Accounts meetings outside the Chamber. Size has a lot to do with it, and we need to be able to accommodate the ministers and their staff. But I think it would be fair to say that if membership was down even more, possibly we could be accommodated in room 512 or something like that, which would make it a very different environment than this.

Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: I definitely agree with you on the idea of having a smaller chamber, but how cumbersome would it be for *Hansard* to have to set up for us each Wednesday morning? We'd want to check that, I think. But I concur a hundred percent that a smaller chamber would provide a much more comfortable atmosphere for what we're doing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Back to the agenda item: do you wish any changes, or do we continue with past practice?
Terry.

MR. KIRKLAND: Well, I'll make a motion that we continue with past practices, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Any debate? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour? Against? It's been carried. I see a number of people not voting.

Is there any desire for us to pursue another meeting location or not? Do you wish to give direction to Corinne?

MRS. BURGNER: Madam Chairman, if I could have the floor, there was an informal discussion we've just had, and if the issue with *Hansard* could be addressed, I think the meetings would be more productive if we could meet in 512. That would address Dr. Taylor's concerns about his wardrobe.

9:20

MRS. BURGNER: Also, as you mentioned, the less rigid arrangement of the setup in this chamber would maybe give us a more productive environment. My understanding is that we do designated supply in 512, and I have yet to see a department that couldn't take up chairs. So they fit. There's also room for the public because it is a open meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you want to move that in a motion to direct Corinne to investigate?

MRS. BURGNER: That would be fine.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion?
Sorry, Corinne.

MRS. DACYSHYN: I was just going to say that I don't need to investigate. *Hansard* has always accommodated us wherever we want to go. It will cause a little more work for them, but they've always moved to wherever we want to be. My only problem with 512 was that some ministers did bring 10 people, and I wasn't sure we would have enough room around the table for 15 to 17 members of the committee as well as 10 staff members from the department. But we can try it. If it's the wish of the committee, I can move Mr. Dinning into that room next week and we can see how it goes. If the members want me to move it back the week after, we can try that too.

MRS. BURGNER: Madam Chairman, just for clarification. If *Hansard* has to set up, is that an additional cost to this committee?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Not to the committee itself. No.

THE CHAIRMAN: But it's an additional cost to . . .

MRS. BURGNER: But somewhere somebody's paying.

MRS. DACYSHYN: That I would have to check. They may have to pay people to come in earlier, which is a probability.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would recommend that we go with the motion. Investigate and bring back a report, Corinne.
Any further discussion, Barry?

MR. McFARLAND: I don't want to prolong it, Madam Chairman. I brought it up, and I was just looking for some common sense to it all. If the costs are too prohibitive, I have to say I wasn't considering the problem with *Hansard*. That's my ignorance, I guess. But if something does make common sense and it creates an atmosphere where we can work a little more cordially, I'm all for it. I think sometimes we're too – or maybe I'm too formal; I don't know. But I think it would be better if we

could work in a smaller working group, like the Auditor General earlier indicated happens. That would be more productive in my estimation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further debate on the motion? If not, I'll call the question. All in favour? Against? Carried. There are a lot of arms asleep this morning.

Moving on, then, there's a standing agreement from past practice for notices of motions as standing agenda items. They've got to be given one meeting prior to, unless it's an agenda item. Will we continue with that past practice? Is there agreement?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Moving on, purely for information. Standing Order 111 allows media attendance, so that we never have a question if media are present. It's part of the Standing Orders.

Confirmation of Sub-Committee on Agenda and Procedure, Chairman and Deputy Chairman to Establish Schedule and Procedural Matters. This, I believe, Gary, has been working well. We've used Corinne as the person who communicates our notes between us. Unless Gary wishes it to be changed, I'm certainly comfortable.

MR. FRIEDEL: I have no objection to that, Madam Chairman. I think it works fairly well. For the most part, it's not a matter of structuring who comes; it's a matter of finding who's available on a particular date. It really only works if we leave Corinne the latitude to work a schedule in that suits the minister and our timetables.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. So we'll continue with that past practice.

Barry, were you stretching or . . .

MR. McFARLAND: No. I just wanted your attention for a minute after Gary's finished.

THE CHAIRMAN: You have the floor.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. When you're finished with this item, can I just make a comment on the previous one? I neglected to.

THE CHAIRMAN: Certainly. You can continue.

MR. McFARLAND: Okay. As far as media attendance at the meeting, I don't have a problem with it, Madam Chairman. But if we were to go to a smaller location, would you keep in mind that if you have media there for whatever reason, sometimes it gets pretty confined. You'll probably end up having to make a ruling on where they are, because it can be fairly distracting, at least in room 512, if you've got a larger group and then the media are coming in and walking around. It takes away from the meeting itself. I'd just like to kind of forewarn you.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. One has to acknowledge that. If you move out of the Chamber, it becomes that more difficult to formalize that process. It hasn't been a problem for five years, but you never can tell. So I'll keep that in mind.

Moving on, then, from 4(f) to 4(g). Once again Corinne has done a commendable job of getting the schedule done. We've had a slight amendment to what was circulated, and I believe that's being circulated at the present time. I'd also like to acknowledge

that we certainly had the co-operation of all ministers to the point that when the Hon. Tom Thurber realized he had a conflict, he personally handled it himself with Corinne. I have to commend him for being sensitive to that change. So you'll see that March 1 is our first meeting, with the Provincial Treasurer, the Hon. Jim Dinning.

Are there any questions about the schedule? If not, is there anything under Other Business?

Nick Taylor.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yes, just listening to the debate and coming back to the Canadian recommendations and talking about a smaller room and more personal, I'd like to make a motion that we recommend to . . . What's the name of this committee?

AN HON. MEMBER: Parliamentary reform?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Not parliamentary reform. What was it?

THE CHAIRMAN: The Parliamentary Reform Committee is addressing any changes to Public Accounts.

MR. N. TAYLOR: What I'm getting at is making a recommendation that we cut the committee size in half. I think it would go with a smaller room and less polarization possibly. Mind you, there has been opposition in this Legislature sometimes to cutting it in half, but the subcommittee makes the recommendation of the names.

MS HALEY: I want to respond to his point. I don't know the name of the committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry. I can't hear you, Carol.

MS HALEY: I want to respond to a point he made. I don't know the name of the committee he's talking about.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Well, failing all else, we could recommend to the Parliamentary Reform Committee, but that goes on and on with . . . I thought we could recommend names to the government. There's a committee in government that names the committee members on nominations.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just as a point of clarification, my understanding was that it was the Parliamentary Reform Committee that made the recommendation to reduce the numbers from 21. It's Standing Order 49(1), Committee membership, and under (2) it deals with "Standing committees of the Assembly shall be established for the following purposes," and of course Public Accounts is one. Part of that, 49(1) through to (2), also addresses membership. The last time the membership was reduced, it was the Parliamentary Reform Committee that made that recommendation. Now, I wouldn't think it's out of order for any committee to make a recommendation back to government or to the Parliamentary Reform Committee.

Carol, then Gary.

MS HALEY: Well, I'd just like to make a comment. I understand what Nick is saying about making the committee a little bit smaller and using a smaller room, but I would like to point out to him that this has to be recorded by *Hansard*. If we in fact have to set up in another room, then that means they have to go into probably the Confederation Room and set up the *Hansard* equipment and all the microphones and everything. It's just not

necessary. This room is here, it's available, it has all the equipment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carol, I have to rule you out of order. We've addressed that motion. It's been referred to Corinne to look at the aspect of *Hansard* and whether it would be viable to hold Public Accounts meetings in room 512. So that has been dealt with by motion.

MS HALEY: Well, I was just responding to a comment he just made.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the suggestion Nick is making is to reduce the numbers on this committee, which is another issue.

MS HALEY: And meet in a smaller room.

THE CHAIRMAN: I beg your pardon?

MS HALEY: And meet in a smaller room. That's what he just finished saying. That's why I was responding.

9:30

MR. N. TAYLOR: Actually, if I may answer, if you permit me, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I was just making a list of arguments – I was listening to the committee here – that there would be less polarization if we were smaller. I think the Auditor General mentioned that. The size of the room we thought engendered maybe more partisanship in discussing issues, and we're already talking about maybe going to a smaller room. All these added together, I think, make it fairly intelligent, within the parameters of our conversation anyhow, to make a motion, and I was so doing, that we recommend to the parliamentary committee – and I was having trouble which committee could handle it – that we cut the size of this committee in half. Now, it will take years. We probably won't do it for ours, but at least we've got the recommendation on the books. I do think it's a big and unwieldy committee.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: The question's been called. I will call the question unless anyone objects.

MR. KIRKLAND: Just a point of clarification.

THE CHAIRMAN: Point of clarification. Mr. Kirkland.

MR. KIRKLAND: Well, I think Dr. Lorne Taylor indicated: what is the motion? Has a motion come forth?

THE CHAIRMAN: The motion is that it's been moved that we recommend to the Parliamentary Reform Committee to reduce the size of this Public Accounts Committee.

MR. KIRKLAND: To a specific number?

THE CHAIRMAN: He didn't say a number.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I said cut it in half.

THE CHAIRMAN: Cut it in half?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah.

THE CHAIRMAN: To cut the membership of the Public Accounts Committee by half.

MR. KIRKLAND: The next point of clarification. Am I correct in stating that there are 17 that presently sit on the committee?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. KIRKLAND: I think when we indicate cutting it in half, Nick, that means that we're going to have take out somebody here and halve.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm taking the chairman out. If the chairman's out that leaves 16. So we put it at eight plus the chairman.

MR. FRIEDEL: The chairman is part of the membership of the opposition component. The membership is comprised of the same ratio that there are seats in the House, so I don't think we can dabble with that. That's prescribed. The reason I was raising my hand before: it is the Parliamentary Reform Committee that recommends to the Legislature the total membership. I would go along with the motion of recommending for consideration of Parliamentary Reform that we reduce the size of the committee, but cutting it in half I don't think is one that would be even physically possible.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to reword your motion, Mr. Taylor?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Okay. May I be allowed to amend it to cut it to nine?

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you read the motion, Corinne?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Moved by Mr. Taylor
that the Public Accounts Committee recommend for consideration to the Parliamentary Reform Committee that the membership of the Public Accounts Committee be reduced to nine members.

THE CHAIRMAN: Reduced to nine members. Any further debate?

MR. FRIEDEL: I would sooner see that we just make a recommendation to reduce the size, because it's going to be debated anyway. If we restrict the focus of it, we're going to end up with either a yes or no.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you want to move the amendment, then, to remove the number nine?

MR. FRIEDEL: Okay. I will move that we recommend to the Parliamentary Reform Committee that they consider reducing the size of the committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: I can't accept that. What I can accept is an amendment to Mr. Taylor's motion.

MR. FRIEDEL: I think that would be the simplest.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll call the question on the . . .
Nick.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'm sorry. Did you accept an amendment? I don't want to back off.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. He was moving a completely new motion.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Okay. We'll vote on this one first?

MR. FRIEDEL: Nick wants a motion in his name to stand, so let's amend it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you move your amendment, then, which is quite short and concise, which was to remove nine? Could you read the amendment? If it went forward with the amendment, this is the way it would read.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Okay. Moved by Mr. Friedel
that Mr. Taylor's motion be changed to reduce the size of the Public Accounts Committee, to make that recommendation to the Parliamentary Reform Committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: The amendment's before us. Do you wish to speak to the amendment?

MR. N. TAYLOR: I may speak against the amendment in all charity. I've been on the Parliamentary Reform Committee. As a matter of fact, I don't think there are many committees I haven't been on. If you don't give orders around this place where you're going, you just go no place. Reducing it doesn't mean anything. They'll sit there and look at it and argue away. If we can't make up our own minds how big we want to be, how in the hell do you expect them to make up their minds? In other words, if we don't know how big we have to be or how small, how do you expect them to know? What will happen is that somebody will look at that and say, "Well, we should get rid of it," and it ends up that it gets postponed.

MR. FRIEDEL: Well, I happen to sit on the Parliamentary Reform Committee as well, and I remember the debate when we went through this the last time. It was like pulling teeth at the time to even, if I recall, reduce the number to 11. Nine, I think — if we become that arbitrary, it will have very little chance of going through.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anyone else wish to speak to the amendment to the motion?

MR. KIRKLAND: I'll speak against the amendment, and I'll ride with the Member for Redwater here and his years of wisdom. I think we want to lead on this particular aspect. We consider, I guess, the philosophy of government today, and that is to down-size. This number of nine certainly appears to be a very radical change. What I'm hearing from the members here is that that would be a very worthwhile number to work with in a committee that probably could achieve what a committee of 17 does. So I don't think we should be afraid to lead on this one. Let's throw out nine, and if the parliamentary committee says we're out to lunch on that particular matter, we'll live with it and revisit it. I think it would be the quickest way to conclude the business on the matter.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? If not, I'll call the question on the amendment. All in favour of the amendment? Against? The amendment's been lost.

We're back to the main motion. Any further debate on the main motion?

MR. PHAM: Madam Chairman, before we even talk about a number, I would like to know the composition of the committee. What is the ratio between the opposition members and the government members? As long as we maintain that ratio, I think the number is unimportant.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Right now the number is 11 government members and six Liberal members. There is a standing order that says that the committee membership must be proportionate to the membership in the House. So it would be reduced probably by, off the top of my head, two members on each side or something.

MR. PHAM: That means that if we do that to nine, are you willing to have two opposition members and seven government members?

THE CHAIRMAN: It's legislated. Certainly we as a committee cannot change that. It's legislated, the differentia. It's differentiated how many Official Opposition members and how many government members.

MR. PHAM: But in case the number does not draw out properly – for example, you have 2.3 or 3.7 or whatever – are we going to drop out or round out a number?

MR. MAGNUS: Well, Madam Chairman, looking at the ratios – and we have to stick with the same ratio – we'd end up with three Liberals and six Conservatives. One of the Liberals happens to be sitting in the chair.

MR. N. TAYLOR: You might change the ratio, on a point of order, but you wouldn't change the odds.

MR. MAGNUS: Well, we could give you less, Nick. You could make it two and seven, I suppose. But the Member for Little Bow mentioned pretty well a lot of people's sentiment on this committee, and frankly I don't see seven or six government members in here, I won't say wasting their time but wondering why they're here, with only three of the other side wondering why they're here. I think this is nuts, and I'm calling the question now.

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

MR. MAGNUS: This is on the main motion, Madam Chairman? Can we get clarification on what we're voting on?

THE CHAIRMAN: The motion that's before us is the motion that was moved by Mr. Taylor. The amendment was lost. So I'll call the question again. All in favour of the motion?

AN HON. MEMBER: The motion is: nine members is what the committee consists of.

MRS. BURGNER: It recommends that we reduce the committee to nine.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the question again. All in favour of the motion? Five. Against? The motion has been lost.

If there's nothing further under Other Business, I would remind you once again . . . No, please sit down. You missed.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'm sorry, Madam Chairman. Could you record the vote?

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry. A recorded vote has to be asked at the time the vote is called, and everything has been done after the fact.

I would like to urge members to please read the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' recommendations, because I still don't think there's clarity there, that people are fully versed on the ones that have been adopted by many provinces. The other is that as chairman I felt there was a consensus within the body to further reduce the size of Public Accounts to make it more workable. Unfortunately, because of the way the motions were worded in the amendment, we lost that. So I'd ask you to give that some thought.

If there's no further business . . . Barry?

9:40

MR. McFARLAND: I know everyone wants to go, Madam Chairman, but two really quick ones. I would like to revisit the downsizing in a general motion sometime instead of being specific. Number two, we could make recommendations to the Canadian council without attendance. If a letter was sent to that council explaining why we're not going to be there but we are sending along written recommendations that may or may not pass through here, I think that would be most appropriate to discuss at a future time.

I move we adjourn.

THE CHAIRMAN: Were you giving notice of motion on the side?

MR. McFARLAND: I'm just asking your indulgence that when we have time, we revisit.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll take direction from that. Okay, we stand adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 9:41 a.m.]

