

Title: Wednesday, March 14, 2007 Public Accounts Committee

Date: 07/03/14

Time: 8:31 a.m.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order, please. I would like to welcome everyone, including the new deputy chair, Mr. Ray Prins. The committee now has nine returning members and eight new members. The agenda packages for this meeting and the reports were distributed last Thursday.

Before I welcome the Auditor General and his staff, maybe we can quickly go around and for the record introduce ourselves, starting with the deputy chair.

[The following committee members introduced themselves: Mr. Bonko, Dr. Brown, Mr. Cardinal, Mr. Cenaiko, Mr. Chase, Mr. Dunford, Mrs. Forsyth, Mr. Herard, Mr. Johnston, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Miller, Mr. Prins, and Mr. Strang]

[The following staff of the Auditor General's office introduced themselves: Mr. Dunn, Ms Langford, and Ms White]

Mrs. Kamuchik: Good morning. Louise Kamuchik, Clerk Assistant, director of House services.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: I'm Corinne Dacyshyn, the committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

May I please have approval of the agenda that was circulated?

Mr. Strang: So moved, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. Moved by Mr. Strang that the agenda for the March 14, 2007, meeting be adopted as circulated.

Now, may I also have approval of the committee meeting minutes of August 30, 2006?

Mr. Chase: And wonderful minutes they were, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chase.

I would also like to note and welcome Mr. Rodney. Good morning.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Now item 4 on our agenda this morning, Organization of Committee Meetings. It is interesting to note that last year was the first time in quite some time that there was a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee held outside session. We have to make some changes so that if we're interested in doing this in the future, it can be facilitated more easily by the clerk and also to give departments a chance to get organized for the presentations.

Mr. Strang: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a motion that we look at meeting out of session in September and October of 2007 and January of 2008 in the a.m. and p.m. and look at bringing in boards, agencies, and commissions.

The Chair: September, October . . .

Mr. Strang: And January of 2008, a.m. and p.m.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed. Read that into the record.

Mr. Strang: Okay. I'd like to make a motion that we meet outside of session in September and October of 2007 and January of 2008 in the a.m. and p.m. and look at boards, agencies, and commissions.

Thank you.

Mr. Cenaiko: I'll second it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cenaiko.

Discussion?

Mr. Chase: Mr. Chairman, just seeking clarification on the motion. Were you suggesting a meeting in each of those months or a series of meetings?

Mr. Strang: One each month.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: In the a.m. and p.m., Mr. Strang, how long would you propose that these meetings last?

Mr. Strang: Well, I think we're going to have to decide, Mr. Chairman, which ones we want. I think that after we decide which ones we're going to do in session with the different ministries, then we can decide which ones of the agencies and boards and commissions we're going to bring in. We might have, you know, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. We've got regional health authorities, we've got AADAC, we've got a number of agencies, we've got the EUB, and we've got the tire board, so I think that that would be what we should look at.

The Chair: Mr. Prins, please.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure how many hours we met last year. Mr. Rodney, I think it was two and two: two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah.

Mr. Prins: I think that was sufficient for AADAC and NADC, that we interviewed last year. I've got a very long list – it's not in hard copy – of agencies and boards and organizations that we could be meeting with. We don't have that in front of us; I was just e-mailed it last night. There are many, many, many agencies that we could interview, and I think that maybe we should get a copy of that list before we make that decision.

My suggestion would be that we would meet once per month, close to the middle of the month. I'm looking at September on my calendar here. My suggestion would be the 12th of September, which is a Wednesday, and October the 10th or the 17th, which are also a Wednesday. Then going to January, that's a long way out. Maybe we should just wait and see.

The Chair: Yes, thank you. For the information of all members of the committee on pages 56 through 60 there is a long list and schedule 18 of government agencies, so we certainly would have a lot of work to do. So if you want to leave that flexible.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'd just, if I may, like to make a comment on the January date. With the new session starting, I think, the first week in February, many of us take holidays in January because that's the only time we really will have an opportunity to go, so it might be very difficult to try and convene this committee in January. I know,

personally, that's the only time we go on a holiday, and I know that many of my colleagues do, so our time has even been shortened a lot because of the fact that session starts. Usually, prior to that we had till after the Family Day weekend.

The Chair: Any other discussion on that matter?

The Chair would also like to recognize and say good morning to Ms Alana DeLong from Calgary-Bow and, oh yes, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. Good morning.

Mr. Prins: I think that what Mrs. Forsyth has said is probably something that we might want to talk about, the January meeting. I'm not sure that we need to put it in the record now. We may want to meet twice in October. You know, we could go maybe the 10th and the 24th or something like that. We don't know when the fall session is starting. Last year we met once out of session: one day, two meetings. This year if we go two days with four sessions, that's doubling already. We could go twice, but that would be six sessions, so that would be almost as much as what we're doing now. I'd like to have a little bit of a discussion on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodney.

8:40

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Chair. After attending a conference in Niagara on this a couple of years ago with a few folks here, a lot of great suggestions from across the country were made. This is one of them: that we can both celebrate some good news with certain government commissions and agencies and also find out a few more details from other stakeholders that we invest a whole heck of a lot of money in. I just wanted to suggest that since NADC and AADAC have already had their day last June, we look at other places first and look at the bigger numbers. That's why I think that we really need to look at the list that Mr. Prins and I and a few others just received.

That would lead to my second point, which is that I don't know that we need to worry about looking at January at all at this point, the reason being that I think we need to first of all decide whom we want to see. We find out how many groups that is. If it happens to be four and we want to spend a half-day with each, there are many scenarios. One which hasn't been talked about, of course – not that I want to stay extra time up in Edmonton-Centre – is that if we did a back-to-back, Tuesday and Wednesday, for instance, it would all be done. Just an idea.

So let's stay away from those two groups. Let's go other places, make a list of who we want, and consider possibly a back-to-back. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Yes. When we're talking about our new organization and the new powers and so on, I would like to have a sense that these will actually take place. I was very concerned yesterday when the Speaker had a different interpretation in the House of the rules that had been agreed upon by the House leaders. As we go forward, I would like to believe that these rules have received the unanimous agreement of all the members and that the Speaker is not going to have a different interpretation, which would prevent our Public Accounts policies from being enacted. I'm wondering if the chair can enlighten me or assure me that the Speaker is not going to view the House leaders' agreement on Public Accounts in a different fashion, as he did yesterday for the Standing Orders of the Legislature.

The Chair: No, Mr. Chase, I don't think we have to worry about that. The Office of the Speaker or the Speaker in my time on this committee has never been involved in the affairs of this committee. We have our own clear direction through the Standing Orders. We are a creature of the House. What you people decide to do, that's how this committee will operate. It's entirely up to the members of this committee to decide how you want to organize your meetings and who you want to bring in. The chair is here to facilitate that.

Mr. Chase: I'm glad to note that we have that autonomy.

Mr. Dunford: Well, this is going on the record, and as such it's not an in-camera session, so I think that the comments made just recently here by the Member for Calgary-Varsity need to be corrected. The Speaker did not make an interpretation yesterday. He simply went with the rules that had been provided to him by House leaders. Now, if there is other stuff that the House leaders were talking about, that's another thing. I'm not used to being, you know, on the record like this, but I'm going to serve notice that I'm going to be a watchdog on things like this. These minutes are available to the whole public, and as such I think it is incumbent on each and every member to act responsibly, and I would charge each one to be able to do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dunford. This committee is a Public Accounts Committee, and it takes the word "public" seriously.

Yes, David Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. In the spirit of that last remark I would certainly like to voice my support to have this committee meet as much as possible, and if there's any question about the individual particular months, then certainly I would like to see that we compensate by meeting more somewhere else. So if there is a popular feeling to exclude January, then certainly I would like to see as many meetings of this Public Accounts Committee as possible. There are so many agencies, as was expressed here, that require scrutiny. The more the better, as far as I'm concerned, and I'm glad that we are opening this up. It feels good.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not opposed to what Mr. Eggen is proposing. I'm just thinking realistically that for our own well-being and health there needs to be a break in this Legislature. All of the agreements that are on the Order Paper – we now know specifically how long we'll sit, from February till June. It's very clearly indicated on the Order Paper when we sit in November. If we need to meet and we decide after the fact that we meet twice in September or twice in October, so be it. But I think, first of all – and that has been brought up before – the fact of the matter is that we need to decide first what agencies we're going to call, and that will certainly then give us an opportunity to say: gee, we may be looking at more days in September and more days in October. I can't recall when we start in November.

The Chair: For the record – and this is from the House leaders' new agreement – the fall sitting in each year shall start on the first Monday in November and will be scheduled to end on the first Thursday in December; for example, November 3, 2008, to December 4, 2008. That's 19 days. The fall session is five weeks. No constituency week will be scheduled.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Mr. Chair, I'd like to reiterate what Mr. Dunford said. This is a new committee to me. The only opportunity that I have had before on this committee was to appear as a minister of the Crown. I'm somewhat looking forward to this particular committee and the good work that it can and will do in the future. So I think that if we stay focused on what we want to achieve and where we want to go with this committee, it's good news for Albertans.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Chase: Also, I was just going to suggest for Mrs. Forsyth's scheduling that according to the House leaders' agreement that was aired yesterday in the House, we are able to designate another individual to replace us with full voting rights. So should it, you know, interfere with a plan, we have that possibility to put someone else in our place and have the full voting rights.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may. I don't disagree with what Mr. Chase is saying, but I can tell you that many, many of our colleagues take a winter vacation. You know, I know several around this table. We all were away in January, actually.

Thank you.

Mr. Dunford: You're all welcome in Lethbridge.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Cenaiko: I believe that Mr. Chase may be wrong on that last comment that he made regarding voting rights. The only members who get to vote are the members that are read into the Legislature, are they not?

The Chair: You are correct. That's how the committee has been operating for a number of years. The standing order allows any Member of the Legislative Assembly to participate in any committee activities or discussions, but they cannot vote.

Mr. Cenaiko: Exactly.

The Chair: But with these changes that are before the House leaders, the standing order changes allow for temporary substitutions with the same rights as regular committee members – for example, moving motions and voting – with 24 hours' written notice to the chair and the committee clerk. The member who is allowing the substitution is responsible for providing meeting material to the member attending in his or her place. That is one of the rules that the House leaders are contemplating changing.

Now, whether they can vote: yes, they can vote, and they can present motions. That is a change that the House leaders decided was necessary.

8:50

Mr. Johnston: Substitutes can vote, and they're the same as every other member?

The Chair: Yes. That is correct.

Mr. Johnston: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Forsyth would like to amend the original motion by Mr. Strang.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may make an amendment to the motion, I'd like to amend Mr. Strang's motion to the fact that we meet in September and October as needed.

The Chair: Okay. "As needed." Thank you.

Any discussion on that amended motion?

Mr. Prins: So what you're doing really is eliminating the January part of the original motion.

Mrs. Forsyth: Right. I'm eliminating January for now. I mean, again, we've had the discussion on the fact that there is nothing stopping this committee, come November, if they feel that they haven't had enough boards, commissions, or agencies appear before them, from making a motion in November saying: we feel that it's incumbent upon this committee to have a meeting in January. What I'm saying right now for the record is that we meet in September and October of 2007 as needed. That then goes to David's comment on the fact that it might be more than one day in September. So as needed, I think.

Mr. Prins: Are you specifying a date, or are we going to leave that open? No? Okay.

The Chair: David Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I think that it's important for us to not exclude the possibility of meeting on more occasions as we see fit. I think that it would be important, first of all, to nail down some times here now but also not to shut down the possibility of seeing other agencies coming forward.

The Chair: Shall we vote on the amendment, please?

Mrs. Forsyth: We're voting on the amendment that I proposed, that we meet in September and October of 2007 as needed.

The Chair: Okay. Everyone understands that? Thank you.

All those in favour? All those opposed? Seeing none, the chair would like to note that that was a unanimous vote. Thank you.

Now the motion as amended. Let's vote on that if there's no further discussion, please.

An Hon. Member: The wording?

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Moved by Mr. Strang that the Public Accounts Committee meet in September and October as needed with boards, agencies, and commissions in the morning and afternoon.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any discussion? Then I shall call the vote. All those in favour? Opposed? Seeing none, again the chair would like to note that this is a unanimous vote.

The chair at this time would apologize to former members of the committee because I think we should thank the committee members who have moved on and wish them well in their new endeavours. I don't mean to single out any former members, but Mr. VanderBurg and Mr. Griffiths were instrumental in organizing the meetings outside session last June, and I think their efforts and their initiatives should be and need to be recognized. I would like to formally on the record thank them for all their advice in the past in regard to improving the Public Accounts Committee and the process. Thank you.

Mr. Prins: Just regarding this last motion, we will have some time to decide which boards, agencies, and funds we can interview. For the new members, at the end of every meeting we have a couple of minutes anyway to do business, and maybe at the next meeting or the following meeting, sometime in the future, we can decide which ones they will be. When they're invited, they can then indicate to us the exact dates they want to meet in September and October and maybe the time, a.m. or p.m., or whether we should even have it for a whole day or, you know, a couple of days back to back. So I'm just saying to everybody, especially the new members, that we can make these decisions going into the future at the end of any meeting.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Now, do any committee members have any suggestions or direction? Everyone is satisfied, as I understand it, with the Wednesday morning meetings between 8:30 and 10. Everyone satisfied with that while session is in?

Mr. Rodney: Fabulous.

The Chair: Fabulous. Okay.

Now, the scope of questions by members. Are there any changes in that, or is there any discussion on how that works or the number or the order of questions?

Mr. Chase: I'm wondering if we would get to the point where, because of the frequency of minister changes, we would be able to ask questions as to the future direction of the ministers. Would that ever be allowed, or are we always constrained to looking at the past?

The Chair: Well, I think it is clearly looking at past expenditures in annual reports, the government of Alberta's annual reports. No one has a crystal ball, Mr. Chase, that could determine that. I admit that it will be confusing, but Corinne has done some excellent work in preparing that chart of the government reorganization that occurred on December 15, 2006. At this point I would ask, as the meetings progress, for the patience of the committee members because at some point there is going to be confusion as to which department is responsible for previous government programs, and we'll just have to work this out. I don't think that we could look at what the government may or may not do in the future. We are looking at the expenditures. For instance, I think that's Gaming's annual report over there, and we are looking at how the money was spent.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for the clarification.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Chair, I understand what we're doing organizationally. But we have our Auditor General and his staff sitting here. I just wonder if we can get on with business and maybe take some time afterwards to do this.

The Chair: We are going to meet with the Auditor General later, and we are going to go over his latest annual report, which is in two volumes. He has many reports out. He's a prolific author, and he has many reports. We're going to deal with that at a specific time.

But perhaps the Auditor General has some suggestions at this time on how we could more efficiently manage our time and his.

Mr. Dunn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are attending here today to observe how the committee is being restructured and organized, so it's not that you're impacting upon our time, but maybe I will take this opportunity to first and foremost support the restructuring that is taking place. You do realize that we will be here next week to

discuss the content of those reports with the committee members. Then following that meeting, there will be a meeting with an organization called CCAF, which will talk about best practices and Public Accounts' effectiveness. That will take place on April 4, and we'll also be in attendance at that meeting.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms DeLong: I'd just like to make a comment, and I don't know whether we want to discuss this topic or not. I'm really keen on how we are restructuring Public Accounts, and I'm hoping that we can be extremely effective in the work that we do analyzing how policy has been brought through in various departments and the effectiveness of how that policy has been brought about.

9:00

I would like to be a full member of this committee, so I would like a sort of equal chance to be able to ask a question. Generally, what we've done before is had somebody from opposition ask a question and then someone from our party ask a question, so it's been very partisan. I was on the committee before, and I haven't had equal chance, I'd say, in terms of being able to ask questions. This is just, I guess, my approach to it, but I'd really like to be able to have an equal chance to ask a question, you know, equal with everybody else in the room.

The Chair: Okay. The chair notes that concern.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, I just have a question regarding the notice of meeting that Corinne just handed out. I see that on March 21 the Auditor General is here for the full hour and a half.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Cenaiko: Then on April 4 there's Mr. Geoff Dubrow. I'm just wondering. We're missing two of these Wednesdays for sort of internal-related issues, like today's meeting, and I'm just not sure if that's the best use of our time. As the Auditor General is at all of our meetings, I'm not sure if he needs a full hour and a half and/or if Mr. Dubrow needs a full hour and a half as well. I don't know.

The Chair: If the chair could respond, Mr. Cenaiko. We've had a great deal of difficulty in the past in getting these meetings organized with various departments, and we have to get started very soon. The meeting week that we are omitting is the constituency week, which is coming up the week after next. This is the House schedule.

At one time we used to spend a couple of meetings going through Mr. Dunn's reports, and we scaled it back to only 90 minutes so that we could meet with one more ministry during the time allocated. I would advise and it would be the opinion of the chair that we certainly need to give Mr. Dunn an opportunity to explain his annual report and also give the committee members an opportunity to ask questions.

Mr. Geoff Dubrow is an individual who has an interest in Public Accounts Committees across this country and in the process. Again, you know, the chair will accept full responsibility for this, but we have been trying to organize this meeting for some time outside session, and it just couldn't be done. We decided that it would be in the interest of the Public Accounts Committee and the system to hear from this gentleman.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, I fully appreciate and understand the great work

that our Auditor General does, but I'm just looking at this schedule here, and April 11 is the first time we see a minister here, which is a long time from now.

The Chair: Yes, you are right, but this year is an exception.

Mr. Cardinal: Another issue just for clarification for myself. I understood that the mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to review public accounts where the money has been expended already. Now, earlier I heard someone here talking about policy also. I need clarification. I understood that this is public accounts, not a review of policy of various departments.

The Chair: Yes, you are absolutely right. The chair will take action if there are policy-directed questions. It is about money that's been spent: why, where. I agree with you because in the limited time that we have, we can get bogged down on policy discussions: what's right, what's wrong, where the money was spent, and why.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate the hon. Mr. Cenaiko's concerns about getting involved and jumping into it and getting our feet wet and our hands dirty, so to speak, but the wonderful reality of this year with the changes to Public Accounts is that we will be meeting on an organized, legislative basis for five weeks longer than we formerly have met. Also, we have the possibility of meeting outside of the legislative sessions. So I think it's extremely important to have these ground rules established and go thoroughly through not only our Alberta reporting but the Canadian reporting in general because our scope for Public Accounts has been considerably widened. We have a budget which I'm very thankful for, and I think we need to be off to a firm start.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Brown, I apologize. You were on the list earlier.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question and concern is relating to the schedule that we have before us. I'm not sure how that protocol was developed. My concern is this: we have agencies such as the health regions, which are responsible for managing the expenditures of very large sums of money of this government. We've got the Minister of Health and Wellness scheduled to come in April, but to my way of thinking, if we want to get to the bottom of the responsibility for expenditures in Health and Wellness, we have to speak to and question the health regions. I would like to see the health regions put on that list at an early date. I don't see why we need to wait until we're out of session to call outside agencies such as the health regions.

The second point I'd like to make is with respect to the involvement of the Auditor General. I believe that it would be prudent for us to talk to the Auditor General, and whether it's the chair and the vice-chair meeting off the record or whatever, I think the Auditor General ought to have some input into what he feels would be most profitable in terms of our investigating public accounts and what areas might have shortcomings. One of the primary purposes of this committee is to ensure that any recommendations or shortcomings which the Auditor General has identified are dealt with and remedied. So I believe that before we agree on a schedule of this, we ought to look first of all at what the priorities are in terms of where the big money is being spent. As I've said, I think it's in health. We should also ensure that we're targeting areas where the committee can be most effective.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Prins, do you have anything to add at this time?

Mr. Prins: Only that it's easier to get the ministries and the ministers involved when we're sitting, and we have an opportunity to call these other agencies for the September and October meetings, which are only months away. You know, that's not a long time. We could give them some notice. I believe that it's very important to be talking to particularly the health regions, that are spending an enormous amount of money. When that time comes, or when we decide which ones we invite, we will send them the same letter.

Dr. Brown: Well, Mr. Chairman, if I could just follow up and perhaps ask the Auditor General to comment on when audits of the large health regions, which I understand are presently under way, would be completed and when we would be able to perhaps delve further into those shortcomings or recommendations that he might have.

Mr. Dunn: Thank you, Dr. Brown. As you are aware, as the Auditor General of Alberta we audit all the ABCs. In the past the ABCs have not appeared before this committee. So you are about to start on a new practice. We have historically always been the auditor of the ABCs, other than the three RHAs that we are not the appointed auditors of. However, each of the RHAs, to be specific, has a March 31 year-end; so do the universities. Each of them is contained within the end report of the Auditor General. So what we'll be reviewing with you next week will be those that pertain to a specific organization.

9:10

We do have some comments on both the Calgary and the Capital health regions, and we'll draw those out for next week together with those that are specific to the ministries. We have comments, as I look down your list here, on the various ministries that you are about to see in the order that you have arranged here. The purpose of the meeting tomorrow is to go through our annual report, draw out which are important, remind you of what happened at that time, what caused the recommendation, and then hopefully plant the seed for your questioning later on, when that ministry or entity appears before the committee.

Now that I've got the microphone, I just want to remind you that as I tried to say in the orientation previously, the purpose of this committee is not to put a minister on trial. That's not the purpose of the committee, picking up on some of the comments. The purpose is to talk about the three Es around public-sector disbursements: the efficiency and the economy with which public-sector resources have been spent to achieve the effectiveness of the outcomes. That's the purpose.

The questions are best directed to the administration of the entity or to the ministry to talk about why you spent in that manner to achieve that outcome. That's what you'll be trying to direct. Stay away from policy-directed matters, which are really the privilege of the House.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair would just like to note to all members the schedule that's been drawn to date, with the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Education and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology all to appear at the top of this list. Those are some of the largest spending departments in the government. It is just to note, but we have had a great deal of difficulty in the past getting meetings scheduled. The chair would again like to say that because in the past we had to get to work and get these meetings scheduled.

Mrs. Forsyth, followed by Mr. Rodney.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I say this. I agree with the chair in regard to his order because as someone who was in two previous ministries, he's correct in the fact about trying to coordinate and get a minister to appear before them because of the very busy schedules that ministers have. So I think, in my mind, he's done a good job – and I'm not going to say that very often – of putting this schedule together.

What I want to comment on is some of the comments that have been made in respect to the Auditor General. I think that, one, as someone who's been in the wrath of the Auditor General in the past on a couple of my portfolios, he's very thorough, he does a good job, and he hasn't been vindictive about it. His questions are very pertinent and, I think, put some light on a ministry in regard to what he feels is a concern. In my mind, it keeps ministers on their toes. What I would like to say on that is that the Auditor General probably would be a very good source in regard to some of the questions that we will have on pages and pages of boards and agencies on lists that he may feel are worthwhile for us to call before us, where he may have had some questions in the past, especially when they fall under a particular ministry. So I support the list that is provided.

I know the difficulty, as I indicated earlier, of being a minister in two different portfolios. I think more important, with the mandate expanded on Public Accounts, is getting to the agencies and boards and commissions that we think we need to call because they need to be given notice.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Rodney.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I'm about to say is made in the spirit of collegiality and expediency. I know that there's a little bit of confusion around the table as to exactly where we are on the agenda right now, and I would just really encourage us to move along considering the time and the amount of work that we could and should be doing. So if you can just clarify, and if we can move on, I think that Albertans would be well served.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. For the record we're on item 4.
Mr. Rick Miller.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I hope that this is an appropriate time to ask this question. As a new member of the committee I note with interest a report on attendance at a summit on results-based management which occurred in Victoria, B.C., last year. The members attending, Mr. Johnston and Mr. Griffiths, made two recommendations in the report, one of them being: "When new Members are put on Public Accounts Committee, they should have at least a one-day orientation, which can be hosted by the Auditor General and his staff, to learn how to be most effective Members of the Committee." I'm wondering whether or not this committee has looked at that recommendation from those two members and if there's been any move toward developing an orientation for new members.

The Chair: This may not appear to be so, but this is the orientation.

Mr. R. Miller: This is it?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. R. Miller: I was fearful of that.

The Chair: Yes. Okay. But there are changes afoot. In the past we had many ministries and little time to examine their budgets, but with the new schedule we are going to have more time. That's why we thought it was prudent to have this organizational meeting today and just not get down to business right away.

Now Mr. Herard, please.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. I just want to support what we've just heard with respect to who it is we're trying to take to account. Perhaps this year there's one minister that's in the portfolio that he was in last year. So I really question the usefulness of having a minister whose new responsibility is the old minister's portfolio. I mean, how is that going to be useful? He won't be able to answer any questions because it wasn't part of his portfolio.

I really want to support what our Auditor General has said. The bottom line is that the Legislature makes policy, but the bureaucracy and the CEOs of our various departments are really the ones that are responsible for managing the expenditure of dollars, so I would really urge us to keep those people under scrutiny. It's not going to be very useful to ask a minister a question to which he constantly has to respond: well, I don't know; I wasn't there at the time. I'm just saying that perhaps we can invite the ministers to come, but I would hope that in all the cases, perhaps except one, they would prefer not to come.

The Chair: Thank you. In the past here ministers have had to leave for one reason or another because of a conflict in their schedule, and the deputy ministers and the department officials carried on answering the members of this committee's questions. There has been a discussion of: is it necessary for the ministers to even accompany their department officials here?

Your points are understood, and they're valid. There's no reason why we cannot direct questions to staff who are sitting at the other end of the table rather than the minister, no reason at all.

Mr. Chase: I have noted in the past that the ministers, whether they were new or old, have extensive staff support in the form of deputy ministers, in some cases two or three deputies, and assistant deputies. So as to putting them on the spot, the selection of the ministers was based on their capacity to take on and lead the ministry, and they have the ongoing support that has been there through the bureaucracy. The bottom line, the end of the trail, in terms of the responsibility is the minister. Therefore, it's extremely important that they be here to account for the past that has taken place in their ministry before they arrived. Even though we can't ask direction questions as to where they're headed, we can at least ask: will you continue along the line that has previously been established? Was this a good expenditure? That's our only attempt to see the direction that will be taken.

9:20

The Chair: Thank you.

Seeing no other discussion on item 4, Mr. Rodney, is it your pleasure that we move on in the agenda?

Mr. Rodney: I believe others may join me in that pleasure. Would you, sir?

The Chair: I'd be delighted.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you.

The Chair: Item 5 is Approved Committee Budget Estimates for

2007-2008. This is a status quo budget which does not reflect anticipated changes as a result of the House leaders' agreement on March 7, 2007, tabled in the Assembly on March 8. Section 4 of this agreement provides for the Public Accounts Committee to meet outside of session, and the necessary financial support for this to take place will be addressed by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services in an upcoming meeting. As soon as details are available, we will let the committee know. Okay? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, item 6 is the committee report on 2006 activities. Could I have a motion to approve that, please? Moved by Mr. Chase that the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on 2006 activities be approved as circulated.

Those in favour? Those opposed? Carried. Thank you. I will be tabling this report in a day or two in the Legislative Assembly. It's a very, very brief report.

Item 7, Other Business. Mr. Rick Miller.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Further to my earlier question I note in the minutes from the last meeting of this committee that the chair had received copies of the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation publication, *Parliamentary Oversight*, and I'm wondering if it might be possible for new members of the committee to receive a copy of that publication.

The Chair: Certainly. Corinne, would you like to inform the committee?

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Sure, Mr. Chair. The chair and deputy chair directed me to order those for all members. I know that there are some members who have them, but most members don't, so those will be forthcoming probably in a couple of weeks, certainly before Mr. Dubrow from the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation is here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dunn: Those who are continuing have a copy of the publication. For the new members, do not be concerned. It is in French and English, so it appears twice as large as it is. If you wish to look through the first publication that's contained in there, it talks about an orientation package: preparation for hearings and frequently asked questions. If you look in that material – and it is not all that long – it talks about the types of questions you should ask of the administration, the bureaucracy.

You'll note that the frequently asked questions are really built off a tool kit that was developed by our office, in Alberta, and supplied to this committee a couple of years ago. If you wish to have the original document that we prepared, we can get a copy of that to you through the clerk. That was tailored for the Alberta situation. This is now built off the Alberta tool kit and added to from a perspective that other jurisdictions have put in there, especially around the federal jurisdiction.

You must remember when you will be looking at and able to examine the material such as ministry annual reports that many other jurisdictions do not have that. Alberta is very far advanced in its form of communication, accountability, and availability of information to the Public Accounts. So certain questions in here do not contemplate the use of the ministries' financial statements because federal and other jurisdictions don't have such documents. But you

are able to make use of those documents. Of course, it has things such as performance measures and outcomes that are all reported within the ministries' annual reports.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I welcome Auditor General Fred Dunn's offer of another tool for our kit. Corinne, if you wouldn't mind, when the federal ones are being passed out, if we could get the Alberta specific, that would be very much appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other business?

Mr. Prins: Item 4(d). I'm going to go back to that, and that is Number and Order of Questions by Members. I think there might be a little confusion as to who gets the first question, the second question, the third question. If there is an order that we have, it might be good to explain that right now.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. In the past this committee has operated this way. It's not like question period where you get three opportunities. You get two questions. I'll be quite candid. The chair has been frustrated with long, rambling preambles by some members. We only have a very limited time, and the first 10 minutes are usually set aside for the minister to give a brief overview of the department and the expenditures.

Then we get down to questioning, for those members who have never been on this committee before. It's been set up that there has been a rotation where an opposition member asks a question and a follow-up, then a government member, then an opposition member, a government member, an opposition member, and it goes down in that way. Sometimes the chair has allowed a little bit of give-and-take on both sides, the question and the response. Now, that has been how this has been done. If the members would like to make changes to that or see how it's working – that has been the tradition at this committee since I've had the opportunity to sit on this committee.

Before the meeting starts, we start this list. As members come in, we are sitting here, and if they indicate that they want to ask a question, then they're on the list, and we go through that. Sometimes we don't finish. When we don't finish, we read the questions on the record, and they are distributed from the department to Corinne, who then distributes them to all members.

Mr. Rodney, then Mrs. Forsyth, please.

Mr. Rodney: Just for clarification, Mr. Chair. I've felt some sympathy for you in the past when it comes to the long questions and so on, but I've also been frustrated by the fact that folks almost ask the day before that they can get on the list. They ask when they're having coffee.

The Chair: No, they do not.

Mr. Rodney: So this is what I'm hoping for in the future. Because I won't pick exactly the words you used, can you clarify that people can put up their hand after you call the meeting to order? Is that the point, or can you tell us exactly how the list begins? I know that it's opposition and government and so on. But when can we put up our hands and get on the list, exactly?

The Chair: There was some discussion about this in the past. I can be here five minutes early. I can be here 10 minutes early if the

committee wishes, and I will sit here. There will be a list for every committee member to look at as they come in the door. The early bird gets the worm.

Mr. Rodney: Right.

The Chair: Okay. If you come here two minutes before your colleagues and you say, "Hugh, I want to be on the list to ask a question," that's how we can do it. The list will be here. It's always been here for people to look at. If you would like, that's what we will do. The chair will make the commitment to the committee to be here at 20 after 8, and as members come in, they can put their names on the list. The deputy chair will be here. Anyone can look at this list any time.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. I don't see a need for big debate on this, folks, but I do think that we should have a determination of whether it's 8:20. My preference, not for any personal reason, believe me, is that it should be when the meeting is called to order. That's my preference. That's fair to everyone. That's the official beginning. I think that would eliminate the confusion of five or 10 minutes or coffee or yesterday. So my recommendation is at the call of the meeting.

9:30

The Chair: Okay. Is that a motion?

Mr. Rodney: Therefore, I would like to move that after the call of each meeting members are free to raise their hands to get on the list to ask their questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Would you like to have a vote on it?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Ms DeLong?

Ms DeLong: After we decide this.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Forsyth, should we vote on this motion?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I'd like a clarification and a comment, if I may.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: The clarification for me as a new member is the fact that when the meeting is called to order, that is when you can raise your hand to ask a question, and the order of that question period is the opposition, the government, the opposition, the government. Am I correct on that assumption?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: So it's up to, for example, the government members. Should they want to have a question, then they need to put their hand up. Otherwise it could go opposition, government, opposition, opposition. Am I correct on that assumption?

The Chair: That's never happened.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. My comment is in regard to what you

expressed earlier when you were speaking in regard to some frustration, the fact of the long rambling. We're starting a new committee. We've got eight new members, I believe, and nine returning. It's incumbent on the chair and the vice-chair to nip it very quickly in the bud and call the member out of order and go to the next question. We're all here at this orientation meeting. I would hope you will pass that on to your colleagues in question period because of their rambling on in the first question.

The Chair: Okay. Point noted.

Ms DeLong: I'm not sure whether to put this in as an amendment right now, but I would really like to see it so that we do opposition, government, opposition, government, opposition, government until all of the opposition have asked their questions, to have at least had one chance at a question. Then I'd like the rest of us to have at least a chance at one of the questions. So I'm wondering if we can put it so that all of the opposition, you know, gets to be in there first and then we all get a chance to get our questions in, just by whoever puts up their hand in order after that.

The Chair: Well, the chair has been making every effort to give all members an opportunity to have their questions addressed, and it has worked fairly well to date. If we speed up the process, particularly with putting a restriction on the long preambles, I think we will have ample opportunity to get a lot of questions addressed. Sometimes we get 30 questions in that length of time. If we are also going to license the length of the preamble, there may be a time where the chair or the vice-chair or any other member will intervene in one of the responses too because sometimes the ministers can go on at great length repeating points.

Mrs. Forsyth: Just on that comment, I think the chair and the vice-chair need to know that they have the support of this committee . . .

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Mrs. Forsyth: . . . for you to be able to stop the preambles. Then it can address Ms DeLong's concerns that all of the questions will be dealt with fairly.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mrs. Forsyth: We don't want to have front-page news that all of a sudden the chair or the vice-chair have stopped a member at a question when it's clearly articulated and understood by this committee that there's not going to be a preamble. It's a question. End of the discussion.

Mr. Chase: There are very few opportunities whereby an opposition has equal time, and I am very appreciative of the fact that in this Public Accounts Committee the rotation does go government, opposition, government, opposition. For the benefit of the members I take very seriously this desire to speed up the preamble. Having been one of the rambling preambles in the past, I will promise to get to the point considerably quicker.

Also, with regard to expediency and speed and getting more questions asked and decent answers, I think you'll look forward to the House leaders' agreement for reform within the legislative body itself, where 45-second questions are followed by 45-second responses. I would suggest that you time some of the answers and speak to your members for the sake of expediency.

The Chair: Can we vote, please, on Mr. Rodney's motion? Corinne, would you be kind enough to read that into the record?

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Sure. Moved by Mr. Rodney that the chairman start the speaking list after call to order.

The Chair: Thank you. All those in favour? Opposed? Seeing none . . .

Mr. Bonko: It wasn't unanimous. Make note.

The Chair: It was not unanimous. Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that.

The chair and the vice-chair can get together in the lounge after question period any day if you have any suggestions to make this committee run more efficiently and smoothly.

An Hon. Member: Some of us have to work, you know.

The Chair: Okay. Well, we're available if you have any suggestions or any concerns or there's a direction that you would like to proceed in. I think that if we work together, we can make this much more effective. Not that it wasn't in the past, but I think we can do better.

Now, are there any other items under agenda number 7?

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, I understand that now we're talking about Other Business.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: So I guess my question is on the huge list that we received in regard to boards and agencies, that we will have the opportunity to question probably in September and October, if I'm correct.

The Chair: September and October.

Mrs. Forsyth: My question more or less would be: how or when do we get to that decision-making process? Do we sit down in our individual caucuses and say: we'd like to see this, this, this, and this?

The Chair: We can meet in the legislative lounge. We can bring it back here. We can do whatever the committee decides. It's up to you.

Mr. Prins: We will have about a five-minute break at the end of every meeting, every Wednesday, to make some of these decisions. So I think that if a group of us or any number of people think that they would like to interview Calgary health region, we can bring it back to the next meeting, and we can discuss it and make a motion.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, it seems to me, Mr. Chair – and I could be wrong; I don't want to make assumptions on behalf of the members – there are a couple that I think people already have in mind that they want to meet with. That, in my estimation, would probably be – and please tell me if I'm wrong – a couple of the larger health regions. So I think we could probably agree on boards that we want to see: the Calgary health region, the Edmonton health region, give them a heads-up . . .

An Hon. Member: Capital.

Mrs. Forsyth: Capital or Calgary.

. . . and say: "You're up. You're in September." Bang, that takes two off the list immediately.

Again, I want to repeat that I don't want to make an assumption on behalf of any of the members, but that's two done immediately. We can at least give them a heads-up and say: we would like you to appear at the committee. I think Mr. Prins suggested, if I'm right, September 13. That's March, April, May, June, July, August, September. So we don't have somebody saying: oh, well, we can't appear before then. And that's too huge.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah, please proceed.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'd like to make a motion that we call before the boards, agencies, and commissions for our first meeting in September, which I'm assuming may be the 13th, the Capital and Calgary health regions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

9:40

The Chair: Thank you.

Any discussion on this motion? Mr. Rodney?

Mr. Rodney: No, I will save my remarks for after the vote.

The Chair: Okay. On the motion?

The clerk would like to get clarification that it's the 12th.

Mr. Prins: September 12 is a Wednesday.

An Hon. Member: Does it have to be a Wednesday?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Prins: No, it doesn't have to be. We're meeting in session on Wednesdays. We could do this on a different day. I'm going to be gone the last half of September, so I'm just giving you notice, I guess.

I think there are a couple of comments here.

The Chair: Discussion on the motion? Mr. Miller, followed by David Eggen.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would vote against this motion and speak against this motion in that it seems to be the case that some members this morning have a list of the agencies that are available to be called, and others of us do not. I think it would not be proper to choose two agencies as this motion would suggest without some members having been apprised of which agencies would be available to be called to this committee. So without having that information in front of me, I would speak against this motion.

Mrs. Forsyth: If there are some concerns about that particular motion, I'm supportive of tabling it until next week, until you get list.

Mr. R. Miller: I would be comfortable with that.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm fine with that.

Mr. Eggen: I also would like to express some reservations about that, just simply for the logistics of choosing a couple of agencies. Certainly those are two agencies that I'm very interested in bringing forward to this committee as well; however, if we can reflect on this for a few days, that will give everybody a chance to evaluate their priorities properly. I mean, I'm good to go on it, but you know I think that some people might want to . . .

I don't know if it's proper or not, but I was just wanting to ask Mr. Dunn's advice on this in regard to if that is appropriate to consider in a motion.

The Chair: At this time the chair would like to intervene and say that the motion was tabled in discussion. The chair has been very lenient here.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, I see. Okay. All right. That's not a problem.

The Chair: Yes. Mrs. Forsyth has decided that we should vote on this next week, after all members have had an opportunity to look at pages 56 through 60 of the government's annual report. There is a long list of organizations that conceivably could appear before this committee.

Mr. Rodney.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, sir. So we're back to the agenda here?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Rodney: In fact, it's related anyway. I really appreciate the spirit of hon. Forsyth's remarks. I would have voted for it, and I'll vote for it next week if it comes up.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Oh, my pleasure.

In all sincerity Mr. Prins had mentioned, you know, that the last five minutes we can make decisions. I sincerely contend that this should take less than five minutes, but it's not going to. There is going to be a serious, perhaps furious debate about who to see and when, and I respect that. It's a good thing we don't agree on everything. So what I would strongly suggest is that we set aside 15 minutes, which is going to be 30, I'm guessing, perhaps at the next meeting, unless Auditor General Dunn really would prefer the 90 minutes. If it doesn't work there, then with Mr. Dubrow, and that we allot a certain period of time so that we can have a good discussion on who it is that we should see. We can slot them in, and this will be completed.

That's my suggestion: to not wait for the last five minutes when everybody's rushing out, to give it full attention for, I'm going to guess, 20 minutes, hopefully, and then it will be done.

An Hon. Member: If you give it 20, it'll take 20. If you give it five, it'll take five.

Mr. Rodney: Great. That's kind of my point. Let's give it a certain amount and cut it off.

The Chair: Alana?

Ms DeLong: Yes. I'd like to suggest that we discuss it after Mr. Dunn has given his presentation because I believe that he's also going to give us some insight and I'm hoping a little bit of direction as to where we could be really effective in calling in specific boards.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dunn, do you have anything to add at this time, please?

Mr. Dunn: Well, first of all, in the spirit of what Mrs. Forsyth had suggested, each of those two RHAs that were mentioned – their budgets are approaching approximately \$3 billion. They were about \$2.8 billion in expenditures last year.

Further to Dr. Brown's question they each have a March 31 year-end. We'll be completing those audits on the March 31, '07, period before the end of June because they are now incorporated into the provincial financial statements, which are released prior to the end of June. However, our report, the very thick report that we talk about from a recommendation perspective, is not released until the first part of October, and it is released in accordance with our act to all MLAs simultaneously. Thus you will not have our most current recommendations available to you in September because those will not be released until October. What you will be looking at is our previous year, the report that is already out, that talks to that extent about those RHAs.

You will have available to you, though, because they do post on their website, their most current financial information. I meet with both. In fact, I'm meeting with Capital this afternoon. I will certainly carry the message to encourage them to produce their financial information publicly on their website as soon as it's appropriate, and hopefully that will be there before the end of August. Should you meet in early September, you would be able to see their March 31, '07, financial information, but you'll only have the Auditor General's comments regarding the year ended March 31, '06, at that time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Prins: You might want to meet with them in October rather than September.

Mr. Dunn: Yeah. To the extent that you'll look at any agency, board, and commission with a March 31 year-end, that type of thing, we will not be reporting on that until the first part of October. That has been our normal schedule. The purpose behind us reporting at that time is that all ministries, as you're aware, do report their annual financial information and their performance information by the end of September. They must all have that publicly available by the end of September. Our report, which comes out on those ministry statements, therefore, follows very quickly thereafter in early October.

The Chair: Mrs. Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Mr. Dunn, I'm sometimes a little slow to the draw, but once I get it, I really get it, so I just need some clarification. When we call boards, agencies, or commissions to appear before Public Accounts, are they under the same rules as what we are now guided by in Public Accounts, where we can only question them from the year prior? I think that's something I need to understand clearly. Are they under a different set of rules, and we can question them on current?

Mr. Dunn: May I make a first approach to that?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dunn: This is new territory, obviously, for the committee and for everyone that's involved: the agencies, boards, and commissions.

I'll let you know that they are apprehensive. You first of all have to determine not just the entity that you wish to invite but who from the entity. Will it be the chairman of the board? Will it be the chairman of their audit committee? Will it be the chief executive officer? Will it be the chief financial officer? What team and what panel will appear before you? You'll obviously have to advise them as to the expectation.

I know that in the past some members, primarily the opposition members, have commented that it seems unfortunate that some of the questions that are being asked have been supplied to the organization beforehand. I don't find that inappropriate at all. Preparation of the organization in anticipation of what they should be responding to is a good thing. Therefore, if you can, provide not just the entity identification, "You will appear on X day," but also who should appear, the types of questions that you would expect them to be able to respond to, thus back to your question, therefore, Heather. We wish to see the comments. And it might be back to what happened in '05 as well as '06, disposition of activities as well as reacquiring certain activities, and should it go into the '07 year? However, all I am advising is that the Auditor General's report is not public until it goes into the House for all MLAs. Thus our '07 report will not be available till early October. The questions that you wish to ask those entities: it's up to you to decide where the boundaries are.

I'll go on to also suggest that the entities would not be able, looking at Mr. Chase's question, to take you into the future very far because, of course, they are subject to what will be the budget that they will be allocated at the next budget period. But they do anticipate matters. Obviously, they have audit committees and board inquiry as to what are their constraints, what are their challenges, what are their succession plans: those type of things. So those could be questions that you may want to consider.

9:50

Mrs. Forsyth: So if I may, Mr. Dunn, ask through the chair. The confusion that I'm having with this – and I want on the record that I support the ability to call boards, agencies, and commissions to the table, but my concern is: are we having two sets of rules here? Are we having one set of rules for the ministry and another set of rules for the boards, agencies, and commissions? Like I said, I'm confused. I need to clearly understand that the boards, agencies, and commissions will be under the same guidelines and principles as the ministries that we will be questioning before us.

Mr. Dunn: That's up to you to decide.

The Chair: For the committee, when we had the Northern Alberta Development Council and AADAC here in June, it was the last annual report that was available to the committee that was the focus of discussion and questions.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Mr. Chair, for clarification: that's the same rules that we have for the ministries?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: Fine. That's all I needed to know.

The Chair: If you wanted, for instance, to bring a regional health authority before the committee, you can always bring them back the next year and discuss the next 3 billion plus dollars that they spent if you wish. That's up to the committee.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Prins: Another quick question here.

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Prins, please.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Dunn, I just wanted to ask for clarification again. You suggested that prepared questions to these agencies, boards, commissions, or ministries would be encouraged so that they could respond to questions that we may already have advance knowledge of.

Mr. Dunn: Well, certainly, subject matter is a very good thing for them to be advised of. That's why within the package of material that CCAF provided are frequently asked questions. You'll see that they talk about risk, and they talk about governance and those sorts of matters. If certain members have a specific desire to be able to address that subject matter, having them be prepared to answer that is, I think, advantageous versus them either not being able to respond and then subsequently responding in writing or trying to do something off the top of their head and being inadequate in the way of the response.

Mr. Prins: Thank you.

Mr. Dunn: So preparation in advance, to me, is not a bad thing for those entities.

The Chair: For the record, ministries that appear before here, certainly, are very well prepared, but there are, to my knowledge, no questions in advance to the respective departments from the ministers.

So we're going to spend some time, Mr. Rodney, at the conclusion of the next meeting discussing our invitation list.

Mr. Rodney: I'm having trouble restraining my excitement. Thank you for that.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

The chair would again offer that if there are any questions or suggestions or concerns, just let us know during the week. If there's no other business under item 7, I would like to move please to item 8, which is the notice of our next meeting, which is Wednesday, March 21, 2007. Mr. Fred Dunn, of course, is going to go over his 2005-2006 annual report, as we discussed earlier, and the November 2006 special report, which is this volume that we discussed earlier. We will look forward to next Wednesday, Mr. Dunn.

Mr. Dunn: Yes, and picking up on the matters that have been discussed here, we will aim to be finished by a quarter to 10, then, allowing 15 minutes, if that's the desire of the committee, to address other matters regarding entities that may want to be invited to appear if that's all right.

You've mentioned the three volumes. What you'll find when we do the review is that we'll hit the highlights of the volumes or the highlights of the matters that have been covered in there. We do ask that you take an hour and glance through it. It is colour coded. If you look at least at the yellow ones, those are the key recommendations we've met. As others have said, for ease of reading, at least look at the side bars for key items and then look and focus on the recommendations that are being made.

Another quick matter. I'm picking up on it, Mr. Miller. Should any of the committee members wish to meet with us, we are always available to meet with any MLA and, certainly, members of the Public Accounts Committee. We'd be prepared to meet with you in

our office and to go over matters of what has been discussed in the past in Public Accounts, what the conduct of that has been, why we make certain recommendation, and why we report the way we do. We'd be prepared to answer any of those questions and supplement the training.

In previous years we've met with groups of MLAs. You've chosen in the past normally to come by party affiliation, but the spirit behind an effective or well-performing Public Accounts Committee is nonpartisanship. Should you wish to appear with a couple of other members, we'd be more than happy to meet with you in groups, small groups, or individually if that's possible.

Since we have two or three minutes left, I'll do a couple of other quick matters. I understand that the government's official response to the recommendations of the outstanding Auditor General's report – I see Corinne nodding her head – is due shortly. That official government response should also be available, therefore, at the next meeting.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: That's my understanding. They will be sending it directly to all members of the committee.

Mr. Dunn: Okay. So when you get that, of course, that takes the key recommendations, the numbered ones, together with the government's response. That's a very fast read. It also helps to understand what is the government's official response. Do they accept it, and who will do what by when? Basically, when will it be implemented? That's a very nice document to read in anticipation of what we'll talk about.

Finally, we'll be asking you a question when we go over our annual reports next week. We'll ask you the question: do you favour us reporting more frequently or only annually? I'm going to leave that with you. Do you favour us reporting more frequently or only annually? We became concerned last year, to pick up on the previous comment by the chair, that we have been prolific writers, I believe you said. We're concerned that matters that are contained within the annual report get swamped by one or two flavours that come out. Clearly, last year in October because of a matter that was raised by the *Edmonton Journal* around food safety, that one segment became very, very dynamic.

We would prefer to be able to cover off what we believe to be the important matters and not just what captures the media's attention.

We would like to find from the committee your desire. Should we have more structured, periodic reporting, such as biannually? Would that be of assistance to the committee? Or do you prefer to have everything contained within one annual report, on an annual basis? So we'll ask to get your desire and direction on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dunn.

I would now ask for a motion to adjourn this meeting. I would like to thank all members on behalf of the vice-chair and myself for your time and patience with us this morning. Motion by Mr. Johnston that the meeting be adjourned. Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 9:59 a.m.]