



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Wednesday, May 30, 2012
8:33 a.m.

Transcript No. 28-1-1

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (W), Chair
Dorward, David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC), Deputy Chair
Allen, Mike, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (W)
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)

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[Mr. Anderson in the chair]

The Chair: All right. I think everyone has got some food and drink, so I think we'll get things started and call the meeting to order.

My name is Rob Anderson. I'm the Member for Airdrie and have the opportunity to chair this committee. It's a great honour.

I think what we'll do to start out, first off. I'd just like to recognize a couple of people here. Obviously, our Auditor General, Mr. Saher, is opposite me. Yeah. He'll be here virtually, my understanding is, at most if not all of these meetings.

Mr. Saher: That's correct, yes.

The Chair: Yes. Awesome. We'll go through that.

To my left is our committee clerk, Giovana Bianchi. I hope I said that right.

Ms Bianchi: Yeah. Perfect, actually.

The Chair: Then our research co-ordinator, of course, Philip Massolin, to my right here.

I think we'll start by just going around the room and introducing ourselves – yeah – starting with the matriarch of the Legislature.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Pastoor: Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Hale: Jason Hale, Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Donovan: Ian Donovan, Little Bow.

Mr. Stier: Pat Stier, Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Quadri: Sohail Quadri, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Webber: Len Webber, Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Mr. Kang: Good morning. Darshan Kang, Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Amery: Moe Amery, Calgary-East.

Mrs. Fritz: Hi. It's Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross.

Ms Fenske: Jacquie Fenske, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Bilous: Deron Bilous, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Anglin: Joe Anglin, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Allen: Mike Allen, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mrs. Sarich: Janice Sarich, Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Fraser: Rick Fraser, Calgary-South East.

The Chair: And Parliamentary Counsel Shannon Dean just walked in, sipping a little bit of coffee there. Hi, Shannon. Good to see you.

Before we turn to the business at hand, there are just a few operational items I wanted to go over real quick. The microphones, just so you know – these things here – are operated by *Hansard* staff at the back. For all the new people here, when you're called upon, the little light will light up, and you'll be able

to speak. Please, also keep cell phones and BlackBerrys off the table as they can interfere with the audio feed.

It's my understanding that this is all live streamed on the Internet, and it's also, of course, recorded in *Alberta Hansard*.

Audio access and meeting transcripts can be obtained via the Leg. Assembly website for those at home.

I think we'll go next to the approval of the agenda. Did everyone get an agenda? Was it all circulated?

Mr. Anglin: I did not. My leg. assistant just arrived this morning.

The Chair: Okay. All right.

Is there anybody else who needs an agenda? No? Everyone else has one.

All right. Are there any additional items that any committee members would like to see added to the agenda at this time? No? Would you like to move? Go ahead.

Ms Calahasen: I'll do the approval of the agenda.

The Chair: All right. Any seconder? You don't need a seconder for that? Okay. All in favour to approve the agenda? Opposed? Carried.

All right. I want to first go through the standing orders real quick with regard to the organization of this committee so that all committee members understand what our responsibilities and authorities are. The main standing order for this is found in your little green books. We look at Standing Order 53, the first part of it.

53(1) Public accounts and all reports of the Auditor General shall stand permanently referred to the Public Accounts Committee as they become available.

(2) The Government shall respond to a report of the Public Accounts Committee within 150 days of the date on which the Committee reports.

That is the main standing order that governs this committee. There are other rules that we'll go over in a second.

Generally the committee meets from 8:30 till 10 a.m. on Wednesdays when we're in session, but we can also schedule out-of-session meetings if we feel so inclined. Committee members should have received a document containing the history of meetings held by the committee since 2007 for your information. It's interesting to see who the committee met with in the past and how many meetings in a year and so forth.

In addition to the annual report of the department or entity that will come to our meetings, the following reports provide background to all meetings.

Oh, I'd like to welcome our deputy chair.

Mr. Dorward: Sorry for being late, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's fine. I got caught in the traffic on the way here, too. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Mr. Dorward: Hi. My name is David Dorward. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The Chair: We were just talking about the different reports that could be considered at meetings. Obviously, the annual report as well as recent reports of the Auditor General of Alberta and then annual reports of the government of Alberta, including the consolidated financial statements of the government of Alberta annual report, as well as Measuring Up: Progress Report on the Government of Alberta Business Plan annual report.

Just so you know, the 2011-12 annual reports for all government ministries should be available as of June 30, 2012. Of

course, we look basically after the fact at how the money was spent to make sure the money was spent appropriately, and of course we won't have that final information until June 30, 2012, for the previous year. Each member will receive a box containing a complete set of reports, and it's a big box.

Copies of the most recent reports of the Auditor General of Alberta, March 2012 and November 2011, should have been distributed at this meeting. I didn't see it on my desk. Oh, there it is. We'll get those passed around as we go forward here just so that you have them. We won't be talking about anything in them today.

8:40

A little bit about the scope of questions by members. It has been the committee's practice to keep the departments accountable with regard to expenditures, not policies. As chair I'm going to do everything I can to not delve into policy. That's difficult because we have so many policy wonks around this table, of course, that want to talk about policy, but we really are trying to focus on expenditures, money that's already been spent, and accounting for those funds and not go into the need for government to change its policy or not change its policy on a certain thing. We'll try to keep the questions to that.

Traditionally questions alternate between government and opposition members of the committee. I'll run a list up here based on any interest expressed by the members. If you want to ask a question, you just throw your hand up, and I'll put your name on it. We'll try to go back and forth between opposition and government members as much as possible. So you know, each member is entitled to a single question and one supplemental. There's no time limit, but please try to keep it reasonably brief, you know, 30 to 40 seconds or something like that. There are a lot of questions, and we want to give everyone as many opportunities as possible. Just because you ask one question, you can throw your hand back up, and I'll put you right back on the list if you want to get back on the list again.

If you look at Standing Order 56(2.1), it outlines the process for substitution of committee members. It says that

a temporary substitution in the membership of a standing or special committee may be made upon written notification signed by the original Member and filed with the Clerk and Committee Chair, provided such notice is given not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Giovana, our committee clerk, is right here. She has a template that you can use for this, that you can give to your legislative assistant. Just ask her for it. If you want to make a substitution, an official substitution, so that you can have – say, two government members or two opposition members have to be away that day, if you still want to make sure your votes are counted, so to speak, you can ask for a substitute in that way. When a substitution occurs, it's the responsibility of the original committee member to ensure the substitute has been provided with all the necessary meeting material.

Members of the Legislative Assembly who are not committee members or official substitutions, of course, may still attend these meetings and participate and get on the list and ask questions, but they may not vote, and they may not move motions.

With regard to committee support we've already introduced, of course, Giovana and Philip. They both provide support to the committee through the Legislative Assembly Office, and I'm going to invite each of them to briefly speak about their roles, starting with Giovana.

Ms Bianchi: Hi. Good morning, again. Basically, I'm here to help you, to provide administrative and procedural advice to the

committee. I'm here to help every one of you if you need anything. My primary responsibilities are to work with the chair on the agenda, briefing notes. I provide the documents that you're going to need for each of the meetings through the website, as you received that e-mail with the details on how to get onto the website, and also any kind of communication with members between meetings and those sorts of things. If you need any sort of procedural or admin help, I'm here to help you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Philip.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning. I just wanted to take a moment or two to describe to the committee what my role is as committee research co-ordinator and to talk about the support that's provided by the Legislative Assembly Office in terms of providing a research service to this committee, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and other committees of the Legislative Assembly. The LAO has provided research support to this committee since 2007. I head up a small team of researchers that does reports and briefings and answers committee questions for this committee and other committees.

I just wanted to emphasize right now that it's important for committee members to realize that we do nonpartisan research. We provide a nonpartisan research service. That means that we answer questions or provide briefings for the committee at large as opposed to individual committee members.

How is that done? Well, typically in the past with this committee it was done through a portion of the committee agenda where committee members could ask us to provide research. Now, in the past what we've done is produced research briefings on a weekly basis for these weekly Wednesday morning meetings. They're of a background nature, but we also provide more focused information on the specific ministries. We can also and have in the past responded to specific questions of the committee, so if you have a question about this or that ministry that is specific to a funding formula or some other financial public accounts type question, we can delve into that as well.

I think that's all I need to say. If there are any other questions or so forth, Mr. Chair, I'm prepared to answer them.

The Chair: Any questions from members?

Thank you very much, Philip.

Before we proceed, Dr. Starke, would you like to introduce yourself?

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster.

The Chair: Starke. I thought it was like *Iron Man* Stark. I apologize for that.

Robert Reynolds will sometimes come as Parliamentary Counsel, but today in his place is Shannon Dean. Shannon is going to help us, but she doesn't want to say anything, apparently. If there are any questions about different points of order, legal issues, general committee authorities, and so forth, we can direct those to her today and to Rob Reynolds when he's here.

With regard to who's invited and eligible to appear in front of the Public Accounts Committee, members have received a document in your materials entitled List of Alberta Provincial Government Agencies, Boards and Commissions which enumerates the entities that can be invited to Public Accounts Committee meetings. In addition to government departments, please note that this list was compiled based on separate official reports. It does not necessarily include all eligible committees.

If you look at the list, it's quite large. There are literally hundreds of eligible boards and committees. I was just looking at it yesterday, and I can't find it in my materials now all of a sudden. Anyway, there are hundreds of committees, boards, commissions, and so forth. Thank you very much. That's what I was looking for. Yes. It's this document right here.

So it's not just the ministries that can come and appear. That's not the case. Obviously, they have the most money that they're dealing with a lot of the time, like the Ministry of Health, for example. That doesn't mean it just needs to be those. Obviously, we can't meet with all of these groups. I am assuming that you don't want to meet with all of these groups.

If we could move on to the next agenda item, I wanted to have a little bit of discussion about that, who we wanted to bring before this committee and so forth. I had a suggestion, but I want to open it up to any suggestions out there among committee members. If you have any, we can discuss them and decide what we want to do as a group.

What I thought we might want to think about doing is agree to meet with the 12 largest ministries no matter what. That would include, in my list anyway, Health, Education, Enterprise and Advanced Education, Human Services, Treasury Board and Finance, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, Agriculture and Rural Development, Justice and Solicitor General, Municipal Affairs, Infrastructure, and Transportation. I would suggest that the committee, of course, have the Auditor General appear as well and give his report. That would bring the number of meetings to 13 for the year.

8:50

Then I was thinking it might be a good idea to add an additional 11 meetings to be held, for which the ministry or board or entity invited could be suggested proportionally by caucus. In other words, the Progressive Conservative members would be entitled to choose six additional entities. This could be the remaining ministries if they wanted to. It could be a commission, Alberta Health Services, whoever they want. The Wildrose would have three opportunities to choose an eligible entity, and then the Liberals and New Democrats would each have one opportunity to do that. The caucuses wouldn't necessarily have to make those selections if they didn't want to. You know, if Wildrose just wants to use two out of three or the government four out of six, that's fine. But it would at least be in their hands, and they could choose.

If those suggestions were to be adopted, that would bring the number of meetings to 24 total for the year in one cycle. They would start in September because we won't have the annual reports until June 30 of this year. By my math considering the Assembly is in session for about 20 weeks in a year, give or take, of course 20 of those 24 meetings could be held when we're in session. That would happen anyway essentially. We're supposed to meet then. Then I would suggest that perhaps we meet on two additional days sometime throughout the year, one being maybe in September and the other mid-October or something like that, and on each of those days have them back to back. So one group would go from 8:30 to 10 a.m. and the other from 10:30 to noon on those two days for the rest of the year, and that would bring the total up to 24 meetings.

That's just an idea. I know I talked with the deputy chair about it the day before yesterday, I think. I just wanted to put that out there and see if there's any discussion on what people thought about it. I would also mention that – we're going to talk about this later – if you can't make one of those two days of meetings that I suggested, we're going to be voting on a motion later that you can

phone in by teleconference if that doesn't work for you. Anyway, I just open it up to discussion from the floor.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Chair, what is the history? Giovana, last year they met 14 times, I believe. What would be the history in other years? Do you know?

Ms Bianchi: Yes. It's all part of that information that was provided since 2007. We can see by year how many times the committee has met. The committee has met out of session before. It didn't meet out of session last year. If you look at the standing committee history, if you go through – and I should note that ministries have changed names, so we try to keep them parallel to their similar names. That's why we have a few extra columns there. Basically, those are the meetings that were held since looking at the 2007-2008 report.

Mr. Dorward: Perhaps somebody who was on the committee before could comment. My only concern is workload and whether 14 was the right number. Fourteen was the workload number. I understood that this committee was fairly involved. If they're fairly involved when it was 14 and then we go to 24, I don't know what the workload is.

The Chair: Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm just wondering, having reviewed the previous history dating back a number of years and bringing us up to today, what the flexibility would be in assessing this particular issue; for example, if just say for today we were to mirror what had transpired last year and allowing the committee to have the flexibility on an as-needed basis to add the necessary meetings once we start inviting the groups for the presentations and taking a look at it.

I appreciate that when I look around at the membership of this committee, there is a tremendous amount of new individuals, including myself, so it's really hard for me to ascertain right at this moment, at today's meeting, what the actual need is going to be. If we have the flexibility to assess this, you know, as we start in the fall, for example, or somewhere along that line in terms of timing and then determine as a committee group that we need a number of extra meetings, we could have the fortitude to assess it at that time. I'm just exploring that at this point.

The Chair: We're flexible, obviously, to do whatever we decide to do. I just kind of quickly totalled up the number of times that this committee has met in the past. For the 2009 and 2010 report I have 15 by my count, 2008-2009 was 15, and 2007-2008 was 25. My concern is just this. I think that perhaps – and there are many reasons for this – we haven't met as much in the last couple of years as maybe we have previously. I don't know if that's going to change or not. Obviously, that's up to the governing caucus. But I think that there's a lot of money to cover. By all means, I don't think we can cover everything in government, but 15 meetings: that's not even enough to do one for each ministry. That would be my only worry.

Ms Pastoor.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to echo your idea of having more meetings. Flexibility is great, but when you get into this committee a little deeper, you'll find out that an hour and a half barely touches the surface of the questions that you really wanted to ask because they go back and forth. You really don't get a chance to do what I think this committee really should be doing

in much greater depth. It really is fairly superficial. At least, from my personal experience it was fairly superficial.

I believe that we should be going back to more meetings, and certainly while we're in the House, we can't have them back to back. I'd even consider maybe having the meetings longer, but we could play with that as time goes on. Certainly, I would support having more meetings and more departments responsible and accountable.

The Chair: Thank you for that.
Mr. Anglin.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you. I'm new as an MLA, but I'm not new to monitoring government expenditures. I don't know of any responsibility that's greater than to monitor the expenditures of taxpayers' dollars. I've had the opportunity to attend some of these committee meetings as a citizen, and I'm going to echo what was just said. There is never enough time in these committee meetings. Our society is more complex, and as we get into these – and I have experience just dealing with how Energy expends money – it is complex, and it does require significant focus and attention. Where I'm going with all this is that more meetings is certainly better. I think we have the flexibility as a committee that if there is no new business coming up, we may want to cancel a meeting. I think we should schedule more meetings and work from that angle first and then deal with the issues as they come forward as time passes.

The Chair: Ms DeLong.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. It's been several years since I've been on Public Accounts, but I was on Public Accounts from 2001 until about 2006, 2007, somewhere in there. During that time we never did meet outside of session at all, and I do note that we have cut back considerably on the number of departments that we have.

9:00

As for whether, you know, we should have the added expense of having meetings with the ability to phone in, I don't know. I do know, though, that most of the work that needs to be done for these meetings actually takes place beforehand in terms of really combing through those numbers, really understanding what the numbers mean so that the questions you ask do really get to the heart of what people are trying to accomplish in these different departments and whether or not the way the money is being spent actually accomplishes what the people of Alberta want. I think that this does work in the setting that we have had, where we've had it during session.

May I suggest that what we do after this session is over is that we start the next session, and at the end of the next session, which would be heading into Christmas, we have a look at it then in terms of what we're accomplishing to see how we want to proceed from there.

The Chair: Ms Calahasen.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. I like change. I think that in most cases, however, we have to look at what the intent is. I'm an individual who, I think, likes to ask some good questions. I've been on this committee for a number of years now. We've had more meetings and then we've had less meetings, and I'm not exactly sure if we ever accomplished any more or any less than what we had wanted to do.

I've also seen that we have met out of session and we have met

in session. Most of the time that I've been here, when we met during session, I think we got a lot of work done, and it was really good because our time was so intense, and out of session it was mostly organizational and some of the organizations that we thought we wanted to sit with. So it really kind of worked well.

I like flexibility; I don't like a set thing. I think what we should do is look at meeting during session and bringing our list of which departments we want to see and meet because sometimes we have some that are more important than others, or at least – I shouldn't say more important – people that we want to scrutinize more in terms of the various departments.

I like some of your suggestions. I like the last bullet point that you had, I think, that suggestion of meeting every week in session, but I like the one of the two additional days. I like that idea. However, I am more in tune with looking at coming in and making a list of what we want to do and who we want to see as each week goes by or every two weeks. I wouldn't like to have it seen as if we want to do this every time and have it set all the time because it does change.

I suggest, Mr. Chair, that we agree to meet during session and look at the possibility of the two-day component in terms of what you have recommended, but I would also look at a flexible kind of situation so that we can make the decisions as we go through.

The Chair: Okay.
Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Fraser: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Just to echo some of the comments. I think it's really important that, you know, first things first, we figure out what our mandate is. Also, I think that initially we should be meeting every time we're in session until we figure out what that mandate is but have flexibility because as we do know, there are going to be certain departments that may need more auditing than others. There are, obviously, some of them at the top of the list rather than being at the lower part of the list.

Those are my comments. I think, you know, that it would be a good idea to meet initially, especially with some of the new members, get our feet under ourselves. I'm all for maximizing our time when we're in session if that means that we need to meet for three hours every Wednesday. I know some of the older people may not like that, but I'd rather get it done when we're in session.

Ms Pastoor: Older people? You mean the ones that have sat there in real life.

Mr. Fraser: Yes, that's right. You know what I meant. [interjections] The wiser members of the committee.

You know, I think that if we can maximize our time while here, that's a benefit and it's probably a lower cost to some of our budgets. So those are my comments. Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Bilous.

Mr. Bilous: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I like the idea that other people have echoed, meeting every week while we're in session, the idea of possibly lengthening our meetings if we find that an hour and a half isn't enough time, if necessary. My question is: how much time do ministries or organizations need in advance to being audited, coming before this committee? I like the idea of flexibility, but at the same time are we putting other ministries or organizations in a bit of a situation by giving them, say, a one-week or two-week notice that they're coming to present to us?

The Chair: Could you?

Ms Bianchi: Yeah. Let me just say that I would say a month is ideal. That's from my perspective, and I haven't been here for very long. We've done it as short as a two-week notice, but let's say that if we can provide a month in advance to the departments, they appreciate that very much.

Mr. Bilous: Just a quick question. Forgive my ignorance. In the fall sitting how many weeks or how many meetings will we have before the Christmas break? Do we know that?

The Chair: It will depend. Generally it will probably be around five. Yeah, it will depend on how long we sit, obviously. The standing orders say that unless it's changed, we start, I believe, the last week of October, and then it has to be over by the first week of December. It could be shorter than that; it could be extended, too. You never know, but it's about five.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Ms DeLong.

Ms DeLong: Yeah. I just wanted to make the point that in terms of being ready for an audit, it isn't a matter of being ready for the audit so much as that you have a large number of senior people who have to change their schedule in order to be here. It's not that they're not ready for the audit so much as the changes in schedule.

The Chair: Mr. Saher, you wanted to comment on this?

Mr. Saher: Yes, if I could offer a couple of comments. Mr. Chairman, your suggestions highlight bringing departments before the committee. Just the point that much of government business is done through provincial agencies. I mean, the statistic as to how much of actual government business is done by provincial agencies – I don't have the number at the top of my head – is 50 per cent or more. I think from my experience in the past the committees had really good meetings and productive meetings by calling some of the larger provincial agencies before the committee. I don't think that that can be done at the same time as the department is here. I mean, the department has oversight, but many of these organizations, you know, proceed with their activities in a sort of autonomous way. So I'd just like to mention to you that I think the committee should consider the ability to bring some of the larger entities.

I'd also like to take this opportunity because they say strike while the iron is hot – I've always felt that the committee could benefit from one of its sessions being singularly devoted to the consolidated financial statements of the province of Alberta. These are the most important financial records. Everything that occurs within government is consolidated into one set of financial statements, and accompanying that is a really important document called Measuring Up, which is the government's explanation of its performance in nonfinancial terms. So an opportunity for, you know, one meeting being devoted just to that I think would be hugely beneficial to the committee and, ultimately, Albertans.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just real quick before I go on – you know, it's too bad we didn't have a copy of this – I just wanted to remind folks what the original idea was. It was to invite the 12 largest ministries – and I've listed those – and then, of course, the Auditor General. Other than that, it was meant to provide maximum flexibility so that the government would be able to choose six entities, ministries, boards, reports, whatever that they wanted; the Wildrose, three; and the ND and Liberal oppositions, one each. That would give us

the flexibility to talk amongst our caucuses and say: "What would we like? Would we like Alberta Health Services? Would we like to go over the consolidated financial statements?" Whatever it is, it would give that maximum flexibility.

9:10

I'm trying as chair to give some structure. I like to keep flexibility, but it would be nice to have some direction at the end of today. Rather than just, "Let's meet every week," which, of course, we've always done when we're in session, actually have some idea of who we're going to invite to these things rather than just go meeting to meeting. It would be nice to have some expectation in that regard.

Now, I have a speakers list. I have Mr. Kang, Mr. Amery, and Ms Calahasen. Am I missing anybody? Ms Sarich. Is there anybody else? No?

Mr. Kang: Well, I think the Member for Lethbridge-East was talking about, you know, us not having enough time, like an hour and a half. When we are sitting, I don't think we can sit for two hours in the committee meeting. We can't have that because we've got caucus meetings and other preparations we have to do. I think, I mean, sure, an hour and a half is not enough time for the Public Accounts. We've got lots of questions, right? But I don't think it will be possible during the session to sit longer than an hour and a half.

Another thing, you will want to have written submissions for who we want to appear before the Public Accounts beforehand. Is that how you want to do it? Before we were doing it as we kind of went along.

The Chair: Well, I guess my suggestion is that we pick – and I agree with you. You can't really do more than an hour and a half in session. We all know the reasons why. We're getting ready for question period and so forth.

The suggestion is that we make a decision on maybe some main ministries that we're going to look at so we have something to start with and then get submissions from the different caucuses on who they want to meet with and then apportion it out based on their membership on this committee. That was the general idea.

Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, my question was going to be directed to Mr. Saher, but he partially answered it by his comments.

However, I still want to tell you that every year we look forward to your report and your recommendations. Now the chairman is saying that we should meet with the 12 largest departments. Don't you think that the other departments should be looked at, too? What is your recommendation on this?

Mr. Saher: I think my view is that a lot of this is situational. From my point of view, if we have issued a report in, let me say, October, and it has a particular focus to it that is connected to a particular department, then I believe, not from a selfish point of view but for an accountability point of view, that perhaps the committee should consider bringing that particular department or ministry before the committee sooner than later. In listening to all of the discussion, I think the key that I'm hearing is that those that are sort of advocating for flexibility in a sense and not setting the schedule too far out into the future, allowing you the opportunity to change it depending on circumstances, that would be the best advice that I could give the committee. In that way I believe that there would be the possibility of a good connection between our work and the committee's desire to use it and the committee's

own reasons for wanting to call particular departments in front of the committee.

The Chair: Well, let me go through the list, and then maybe we can all be thinking about some motions that might bring an end to this discussion or a resolution to it.

Ms Calahasen.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really think that the Auditor General's report is an important one, and I would see that as a first report that we should look at because that sets the stage for whatever else we're going to do. I think that he's always ready. He's always got some great recommendations, and I think that that permeates whatever we're going to do throughout our time.

I think an hour and a half is long enough. There are times when we've sat where we didn't have any questions, none of the two had questions, and there were times when we wanted more questions. When I'm talking about flexibility, I'm talking about flexibility not only of the fact of who we choose but the time as well. So if we're going to do the time, I would look at the consolidated reports as a longer time being required because that's a longer, bigger piece of information.

Now, on the other portions I'm okay with an hour and a half. I know that we have fantastic questions from every caucus that's here, and I think that we should be able to do that in that time. The previous chair always asked us if we wanted to read into the *Hansard* other questions, which has made it very good for us so that we didn't have to be worrying about, you know, sitting here for three hours and twiddling our thumbs in some cases.

What I would suggest is that an hour and a half is good during session. If we wanted to do something that was really comprehensive, like the consolidated one, I would suggest that we go to another day – maybe that's that other time that you suggested – and then we do that. But I don't know if I'm supportive of 24 meetings. I just am not. When I'm talking about flexibility, that also talks about that. I think what we should be doing is looking at: which ones do we want to go with? Which other kinds of other committees do we want to see? Then we can determine that in terms of where we want to go with those.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A couple of things come to mind through the great discussion by all committee members that have had the opportunity to speak this morning. It appears that there is a courtesy in signalling which group we would like to have come forward to the committee. In that consideration historically there has been a month's or a couple of weeks' notice, so I'm wondering if we're thinking about a motion and what, for example, we would be structuring in the fall.

If we were going to give a courtesy, do we have a sense of what we would say today? For example, if it's important to the committee to go through the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, would we be signalling and prepared to say that today, or are we pausing to have a bit more time to have another discussion in the fall regarding who would be the first presenter and what courtesy we would provide in that notice and how that would be. Or it could be determined by the chair and deputy chair, that courtesy for the fall, if we have some appropriate feedback on what that first presentation would be.

The other consideration is that I did have a question for Mr. Saher. In terms of the consolidated financial statements and the Measuring Up documents I'm wondering if you would have any

insight to share with the committee. If, for example, that would be high on the priority list, to receive that presentation, would it help us as a committee to set the stage as to what priority government departments would be structured after receiving that presentation and asking questions around that? Or from your experience would those reports be received and analyzed through this committee structure at a different time?

I'm just trying to sense what, perhaps, we could start with. You know, I'm a new member, so I'm just trying to get a sense of what would be helpful for us and to expedite where we would like to go in terms of presentations.

Mr. Saher: Mr. Chairman, can I take a second to answer?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Saher: Thank you. My suggestion that some time be spent having the Ministry of Finance present the consolidated financial statements and Measuring Up: I think it is a good stage setter. On the other hand, I think it's as much just educational.

I wouldn't say that it's the mandatory first thing to be done. There would be some logic in putting it earlier in a schedule, but I think it's as much informational, and I think it could be made even more informative if it actually was turned into some sort of briefing on, you know, the Alberta government's accountability process, business planning, and then how the reports of ministries seek to be accountable for the ministries' actions and then how the consolidated statements – you know, their role in all of this. My suggestion is as much from the point of view of education as it is to actually set the scene.

9:20

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'll just close with that it seems what I've heard this morning is that at the very minimum the committee would be meeting during the legislative session and also hearing that there is a bit of a courtesy notice given to the first group, whichever would be determined by the committee. That may take us back to one of your suggestions, to have a meeting before. Either we sort it out today or we have another discussion at another point in time to set that so that we are giving appropriate notice. There may be other suggestions on how to do that, but at least at the very minimum it would be that. Also, I heard about flexibility to determine as a committee how many more appropriate meetings after that.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Ms Pastoor.

Ms Pastoor: Thanks, Mr. Chair. To follow up on Mrs. Sarich's remarks, I'd like to make a motion so that we can start moving this meeting forward. I think we've been here for almost an hour, and what have we done other than maybe throw out some new things for the new people? I think we'd like to also see something get going because we don't have that many meetings and we don't have that much time.

I'd like to make a motion that

the suggestion of the Auditor General be accepted . . .

It could well be our very first meeting.

. . . and that we have the Finance people present the consolidated statements and the Measuring Up document.

I believe it's a really good first step, and it would be good homework for the new people on the committee and myself as well. Don't get me wrong. I don't think I've actually gone through that statement as well. It would be good homework over the

summer so that we could perhaps start in September with a real overall picture of where we're going. I'd like to make that motion and at least we've got one thing to work with.

The Chair: Great. Why don't we make that – the motion from Ms Pastoor, my understanding, is to meet in September and have the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board present the consolidated financial statements and the Measuring Up document report.

Could I add a friendly amendment to that? Is that permitted?

Ms DeLong: We should second the motion first.

The Chair: Do you second the motion? I'm pretty sure you can bring a friendly amendment. Could we make a friendly amendment to say: a two-hour meeting? We were saying that we needed a little extra time for that.

Ms Calahasen: That's before session, though, Mr. Chair, right?

The Chair: September. Yeah.

Is that fine?

Ms Pastoor: Yes, that's acceptable.

The Chair: Okay. For two hours.

Ms Calahasen: I would like to add onto that, Mr. Chair.

Ms Pastoor: That's a friendly amendment, right, Pearl?

Ms Calahasen: Yes, it is: following which the committee will decide which boards and agencies or commissions it will invite for its other meetings. If you don't like it, you can go against it.

The Chair: Okay. You want to decide that at the next meeting?

Ms Calahasen: I think so. I think we have to set it up. I think that at that point we will decide.

Mr. Dorward: I'm just concerned about the time. If we're going to meet very quickly after that, we're not giving them that month's notice. That's the idea.

I just did a quick look, and there are five what I call no-brainers, if I could throw that out there, ones that have not been done for two years, which are Health, Education, Infrastructure, Environment, and Transportation. Maybe we could select from that list and at least get going with a little bit of a list to start.

The Chair: Let's deal with the motion on the floor first. If there are additional ones, we could go to additional motions.

Go ahead, Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: The suggestion for the motion also included the Auditor General's report. We quickly moved in this motion, saying the words "consolidated financial statements" and "the Measuring Up report" and dropped off the Auditor General's report. In that two hours are we also including the Auditor General's report, or will that be scheduled thereafter?

The Chair: Mrs. Sarich, I thought that would be a separate day that you'd want to come. That's a lot of material to cover in one day, is it not?

Mr. Saher: From experience and my sense of the members' desire to ask questions, sometimes having us present one of our reports for one and a half hours is too long. So I think that in the spirit of giving the committee information on the highlights of our report – I mean, it's my view that it could be fitted into that one

and a half hours. Sorry; two hours? [interjection] I think what the committee is saying is that that first meeting is to get a sense of the lay of the land.

The Chair: Okay. Let's deal with one motion at a time, and then we'll get back to that. I'd like some discussion on that. Let's get to at least the first motion of a two-hour meeting to go over the consolidated financial statements, the motion put forth by Ms Pastoor. Let's have a vote on that.

Ms DeLong: Just a clarification. We're only dealing with what the first meeting should be about.

The Chair: That's right. That's all we're dealing with.

Ms DeLong: Okay. Yes. Excellent.

The Chair: Yeah. It's the only thing we're dealing with right now.

Mr. Dorward: I'll second that.

The Chair: All right. All in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Now, let's go quickly to – well, I want to say what I've heard here. Obviously, what we just passed I heard. We, clearly, want a meeting with the Auditor General either on this exact same day or not. Certainly, there seems to be broad agreement that we meet weekly while we're in session from 8:30 to 10. There is a desire for flexibility, so I take that to mean that we want to perhaps, please, submit to the chair and deputy chair what the different members of this committee, frankly, would like to see come forward. I do think that the deputy chair put forward a fine idea in saying that at the very least, maybe to start the process for the fall, we should be looking at Health, Education, Infrastructure, Environment, and Transportation. I'd add onto that Human Services. That's a massive ministry and one that's very important. So that's what I've heard so far.

Let's go back to the Auditor General. I've only been to two of the presentations where you were there, and I remember I had a ton of questions. It was very interesting. Honestly, I don't know if fitting it into the same day as the consolidated financial statements is necessarily wise.

Mr. Saher: No. That's fine. I fully accept that. The only suggestion I would make – our fall report comes out, if everything goes according to plan, sometime in October.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

Mr. Saher: So I would recommend that your meeting with my office be sometime after the October report is issued. I think that would then give us an opportunity to brief you on that October report, a July report that we intend to issue this year, and also the one that we issued in April.

The Chair: Okay.

Would someone like to put a motion that

we invite the Auditor General to come and speak to the committee after his report is released in October.

Ms Calahasen: Sure. I will.

Mr. Anglin: I'll second that motion.

The Chair: Apparently, we don't need to second. That's right. It's kind of nice, though, to have a seconder, a backup.

All in favour? Opposed? Carried.

By the way, if anybody wants it read into the record that they oppose something, just let me know, and we'll read it in the record.

Mrs. Fritz.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like it read into the record that I oppose the motion not because of the intent of the motion overall but because of what I heard the Auditor General say earlier, that we could review his report on the same day.

I look at this committee. It's huge. The expense of bringing *Hansard* here, the Auditor General here, people for a meeting in Edmonton. I think two hours is a lengthy time for the consolidated statements. Over half of the committee is new. That would be a good information session. But I also think that we could spend a full day if we need to review the Auditor General's report, and at that time we could do that. It would just save an awful lot of money to do that. We have the time. If you're scheduling a day, we should schedule a full meeting.

The Chair: Well, we'd like to have kind of a – Mrs. Fritz, would it be an idea to give the Auditor General half an hour on that day that we come here to at least present kind of an outline of what he does, like, kind of an introduction to the group?

Mrs. Fritz: The Auditor General will be here with the consolidated reports.

Having said that, I'm just speaking to why I oppose the motion, just for *Hansard*. We've already carried the vote.

The Chair: Okay. All right. Fair enough. Let's move on. It was read into the record.

Ms Calahasen: But it's a good point.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. All right. It's a very good point.

Ms Sarich.

9:30

Mrs. Sarich: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just wondering if we feel comfortable today, given that the deputy chair has identified some of the big areas, departments that have not come forward to this committee in, I think I heard, two years, in identifying, for example, health and wellness at this time or one of that selection. If we feel comfortable in identifying that and would set that one, that would give that courtesy of notice at least from today onwards.

The Chair: Absolutely. That was one of the five motions. Would somebody like to move? I'm not sure. Can the deputy chair move? I know I can't. I don't think he can. I would suggest and would ask that we – he can? Somebody other than me needs to make the motion. He had said Health, Education, Infrastructure, Environment, and Transportation. I would suggest Human Services be added to that as well. That could be our starting six ministries that we work on to make sure that they come during the fall session if that's agreeable, but I'll let the deputy chair speak to that.

Mr. Dorward: Yes. I'll make a motion that

the first six reviews that we do are Health, Education, Infrastructure, Environment, Transportation, and Human Services.

The Chair: That's after the consolidated financial statements meeting, not the first. I guess it would be the second through seventh or something like that.

All right. The motion is on the floor. Any questions, clarifications needed? All in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Do we need a motion for meeting weekly from 8:30 to 10 when we're in session, or is that in the orders?

Yes, Ms DeLong.

Ms DeLong: I'd like to make a motion that our next meeting, assuming that this is the end of session this week or, put it this way, the next meeting that we have after this session ends, is the first week in session rather than having an extra one in September.

The Chair: The motion on the floor that was passed said September for this because we're going to have an extended one.

Ms DeLong: Oh. Okay.

The Chair: Yeah. All right.

Ms DeLong: No, we did not have that in that motion. You said that that motion was just about what was going to be the topic of the next meeting. We didn't actually vote on when the next meeting was.

The Chair: Well, let's get clarification.

Giovana, could you read that back?

Ms Bianchi: Yeah. The motion is that the Finance department be invited to present the financial statements and Measuring Up documents for the first meeting of the committee in September and have it be our meeting.

Ms DeLong: After that, the chair clarified that we were just talking about the subject of the first meeting.

The Chair: Okay. All right. Well, I apologize if I didn't clarify that properly.

So we do not have to vote on meeting weekly during session. That's already in the orders.

The only other piece was that – and I don't think we need a motion for this – if the caucuses or the members could submit to the chair and the deputy chair what entities or boards and so forth they would like to see examined, probably in the spring when we come back, because I think we have enough to carry us through fall now, that would be good. Then what we could do is that at one of our meetings we can get together and find some agreement and bring a motion forward perhaps through the deputy chair on what our business activities will be in the spring. I don't think we need a motion for that. Just please do that.

Mrs. Sarich, then Ms Pastoor.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If our members make this submission and there's this discussion amongst yourself and the deputy chair, I'm wondering if we could have the flexibility, although we have identified six or seven ministries that would be coming forward, because it was pointed out that there are provincial agencies, very large ones, that do a lot of work for the government, to call upon those agencies if we identify them early enough to give notice somewhere in that fall session if the need arises.

The Chair: Absolutely. I think that if you can get that information to us as quickly as possible, the more notice we give them, the better. I would again urge committee members to do that.

We have roughly 25 minutes left. I would like to invite Mr. Saher . . .

Sorry. Go ahead, Philip.

Dr. Massolin: Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Chair. I was just wondering before we conclude this, very quickly, if can I get a direction from the committee to start preparing weekly research briefings for these upcoming meetings.

The Chair: Absolutely. Do we need to do a motion for that?

Dr. Massolin: No, you don't. I just wanted to make sure that it was clear.

The Chair: Absolutely. Look at us. I mean, help us out here.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: I just wanted to comment further to the opposition to my motion and with great gratitude to the Member for Calgary-Cross. She makes a very good point, which had escaped me, I guess, because I'm so used to doing it. We all have to come up here in September. If we can make it a longer meeting, it does feel more productive. I know I fly at 7 o'clock in the morning, and I fly home at 6 o'clock at night even if I've only been here for a couple of hours. I don't mind sitting – and I don't think anybody else would mind sitting – and getting more work done in that day, so if you could keep that in mind as well.

I certainly thank again the Member for Calgary-Cross for remembering just how arduous it can be to come up for short meetings.

The Chair: Can I ask a clarification from Mr. Saher? You had said that your report won't be ready till October. So can we still meet in September about the previous report, or what would be your suggestion?

Mr. Saher: Certainly. If you were thinking of meeting with my office in the October time period, I was going to suggest that you wait until the October report is issued, but if you're meeting in September and wanted to hear from us on our March 2012 and a report that we intend to issue in July, that could certainly be.

The Chair: Okay. Well, perhaps, I can call on Mrs. Fritz to make a motion

to hold a one-and-a-half hour meeting with the Auditor General on the day that is selected in September.

Mrs. Fritz: So moved. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion? Those in favour? Oh, sorry.

Ms Calahasen: For clarification, that's in addition to our meeting initially?

The Chair: In addition.

Ms Calahasen: So that would be another meeting that we would be going to?

The Chair: On the same day.

Ms Calahasen: On the same day. Oh, I see. I'm okay with that.

The Chair: All in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Thank you, Mrs. Fritz, for making that as efficient as possible. That was a good idea.

Okay. Are there any other questions on that matter?

There was a note brought up that we hadn't accomplished much, but this is how the chair will do things. We're going to have discussions as a group and hammer things out as much as possible so that we have buy-in from all committee members.

Mr. Dorward: Just to further that conversation, then, we now have said that we have, hopefully in later September since September includes the 28th, 29th, and 30th – I'm not sure what days those are – two meetings which will be held the same day. Then we're going into session I heard later October, which we'll have about five weeks at the most. We had a conversation earlier about getting more done, but now we're back to a situation where we haven't found any dates to get more done although, altruistically, we think we maybe should.

Are we able to get one of those met with that day? We probably have an hour and a half and two. That's three and a half hours. Do we want to have a ministry come in the afternoon and get a real full day, or do we want to have one more prior to the session? I mean, the nuts and bolts of this conversation, I guess, is that we're not going to get to 24 if we don't decide at some point in time when we would squeeze in other meetings. Do we want to further that conversation, or just go with what we've done so far?

9:40

Ms DeLong: Again, I do believe that for these meetings to be effective, we've got to have materials beforehand. There is an awful lot of preparation to be able to get your mind around the Auditor General, the work that he does, and also the consolidated statements at the same time. You know, that is a tremendous amount, so I think that we should just be doing that. Again, may I suggest – and maybe this could be a motion – that our last meeting in the fall is where we decide where we're going to be moving forward with additional meetings after that.

The Chair: I'm more than happy to discuss that with the deputy chair. Maybe that's something we can discuss at a later time. I don't know which meeting, Ms DeLong, but certainly we will have that discussion. You have my word on that. Hopefully, we can have some of this stuff discussed before we come.

We do need to move on. We've only got 20 minutes left. Mr. Saher, you've spoken a little bit about what your role is with regard to the Public Accounts Committee. Could you take maybe two or three minutes and just expand upon that a little bit so that folks can understand this?

Mr. Saher: Certainly. Thank you for the opportunity to do that. I was thinking last night: how would I succinctly explain the relationship between the Public Accounts Committee and the office of the Auditor General? I think that the way to describe it is that I think it's a mutually supportive relationship. The committee requires credible information on the government's financial and nonfinancial performance in order to do your work of holding the administration accountable for the execution of policy, and I sort of stress that, Mr. Chairman, because you stressed it at the beginning. The committee deals with the execution of policy; it does not deal with policy itself.

You'll receive from the office our reports on financial statements and the work we do on performance measures in each of the ministry annual reports and on Measuring Up. What we give you, I believe, is credible information on what has happened. That's sort of our part of the relationship. We in the audit office would ask for the committee's support in debating, if necessary, any recommendations that you have a sense that the government is not implementing. My work is not complete until a recommendation that we've made – first, it's accepted, but until it's implemented, we really haven't made a difference.

There are times where you'll see in committee meetings that we might be suggesting to you that you please inquire of the department in front of you why progress on implementing a

recommendation is slow. Is there a problem? Do you disagree with the Auditor General? What's the issue? That's one of the things we ask in return, if you will, is assistance in us being successful in having accepted recommendations implemented.

As an audit office we act as both sort of a witness and adviser. So the meeting that you've decided to have with the office in September: my colleagues and I would be sitting here as a witness, if you will, explaining to you our work and be ready to take your questions.

In your regular meetings with other organizations – I mean, sort of traditionally we've sat here; I don't quite know where we'll sit – we're really there as an adviser. I mean, it's perfectly in order, in my opinion, for committee members to direct questions to us if the subject matter of the discussion is centred on something we've said in one of our reports. But, generally speaking, we will not speak because it's your time to ask questions. If anyone of us hears a response that doesn't make sense to me or my colleagues, we will certainly interject if we believe it would be useful. So if we heard a ministry representative say something that we didn't believe was appropriate or was incorrect or needed clarification, we'll assist in that way. But, generally speaking, at your regular meetings we're in attendance as advisers, not as witnesses.

I think we can provide you as committee members a lot of assistance as you do your work, and I think we can bring forward ideas on that because we have a lot of experience in the past. For example, we have in our records sets of questions that committee members could ask, not specific ones but generically the sorts of things that we believe are good lines of inquiry. I'd like an opportunity, Mr. Chair, to meet with you and the deputy chair and further explore those finer points.

I'd just like to mention an organization called the CCAF, the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation. It's a research and education foundation that works very closely with Canadian public accounts committees and Auditors General across Canada. They have a very robust program of providing support to public accounts committees in terms of helping them become more effective. Again, Mr. Chair, I'd like to talk to you and the deputy chair about the potential of that organization providing some advice and support over the days ahead.

Finally, I'd just like to mention that we will be issuing a report in July. If that doesn't sort of square with your general understanding of the audit office, the audit office does work that is public in April and October. We've actually moved to a more flexible schedule of periodic reporting, and we believe that we'll have material that should become public sooner than waiting to next October.

The main subject areas there are primary care networks, which is a new piece of work, and we have follow-up work on occupational health and safety and drinking water. I mention those because if committee members are thinking of the order in which those major ministries should appear or could appear before you, I suppose I'm signalling that Health and Human Services perhaps could come sooner than others because there would be a connection with the work of the office.

Lastly, I'd like to just mention that apart from the audit work that we do and that is reported in our public reports, we have a sort of component of our work program which we call knowledge of business, where we are trying to explore certain areas of government business so that we have a better understanding such that that can lead to a better and more focused audit. I just want to let the committee members know that we're currently working on what we're calling a health knowledge of business. We're trying to better understand roles, responsibilities, cost drivers, what the keys are to health being successfully delivered in this province

such that if we can get a better knowledge base, we think that we can do better and more focused audits.

We're also working on pensions, government pension plans: what are the risk management systems, who owns those risks, and what are the systems to manage those risks? I'm talking about the government public-sector pension plans.

Finally, aboriginal matters. It's an area that we would like to do audit work in, but before just diving in, we're doing what we call some research on what all of the departments are that are involved in assisting the government in meeting its goals for the aboriginal peoples.

I just wanted to signal to you three areas of work that are of interest to the office. I hope they'll be of interest to committee members. I would just encourage any committee member at any time – it doesn't have to be during a meeting – that if you wish to talk to us about any of that, please do get in touch.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Mr. Saher.

We are going to go on to some other business in our remaining 10 minutes here.

Mr. Dorward: A quick clarification.

The Chair: Oh. Go ahead.

Mr. Dorward: I was intrigued by your comment relative to the need for us to be aware of the Auditor's reports relative to the departments and ministries and the need for us to hold them somewhat accountable for the recent findings there in that regard. Is that something you'll remind us of, or is that a general comment that you made now and then we won't really talk that much about? Will you be bringing to us prior to a meeting definitive documentation relative to that?

Mr. Saher: Well, if the committee goes ahead with that plan to meet in the second of the two sort of meetings in September, as I understand it, on the same day, one and a half hours with this office, we would be briefing you on that July report and also our March 2012 report on postsecondary institutions. I think we would always take every opportunity of drawing your attention to and reminding you of the work of the audit office.

9:50

The Chair: All right. I'm mindful of the time. I'm going to ask Ms DeLong to make her comment here. I'd ask that we move on because we do have, actually, quite a bit more to do in the next 10 minutes.

Ms DeLong: Just a really quick question. I believe that our mandate before was that we look at the previous books, okay? Does it now say that we just look at what the Auditor has provided us? When you come forward with your reports, do we have the ability to really get into them and ask the relevant questions?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Saher.

Mr. Saher: Yes. I think that you will always be dealing with the most recent work of the audit office but also, and most importantly, the annual reports of the ministries and that summary-level report of the government on consolidated financial statements and Measuring Up. All of that will be public by the end of June.

The Chair: Right. We're going to move on now.

Other business. The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors. This

year this organization is holding a conference. It's hosted by the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut and will take place from August 19 to 21 in Iqaluit as per the invitation letter that was distributed to members. You should have those in your materials. The budget for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which is also in your information, which has been approved by the Members' Services Committee so there's nothing we can do here to increase our budget or decrease our budget, provides funds for limited travel by committee delegates to attend the conference. Traditionally the chair, the deputy chair, the committee clerk, and the committee research co-ordinator attend this conference. But this year, exceptionally the committee research co-ordinator – Philip, you don't want to go to Iqaluit, to Nunavut? No?

Dr. Massolin: I'd love to go, but I can't.

The Chair: Okay, fine. Anyway, he can't make it, so that's creating an opportunity in the budget for an additional member to attend. The deputy chair and I have both indicated that we're still able to attend. The committee clerk is able to attend. What we want to do with regard to this open spot is, I would suggest, that we want to hold a lottery for it. Take a week or so. Talk to your family. Again, it's August 19 to 21. Plane travel will be provided. Reasonable plane travel will be provided. Perhaps, you know, you can talk a little bit about what's included so people can make decisions on that.

Ms Bianchi: Yeah, sure. I would offer, instead of us getting into the details on logistics here, that I will send you an e-mail right after the meeting so that you can have that information in writing in terms of options of flights. Because of the distance you would have to plan to be able to leave on the Saturday. There are some flight limitations. I have done some research, and I'll be pleased to provide you all with that information so that you can decide if you are available and interested. I will commit to sending that e-mail right after this meeting.

Then in terms of the expenses covered, I will provide some information as well, but as the chair mentioned, partners or spouses are also covered within reason and within some limitations in the committee budget.

Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: If you've never been there, you really should go and see what's happening because it's a new territory, and it's just a totally different world. If anyone here hasn't gone to Nunavut, I would suggest that you try to get there.

The Chair: How this would work is that – well, first we'll move a motion to hold a lottery for this open spot. How it would work, if it's passed, is that I'd ask that within the next week, so by June 6, 2012, you inform – can we say the committee clerk? – Giovana or myself, and I can pass it on to Giovana, but Giovana, please, if you'd like to be entered in the lottery. Then what will happen is that if your name is added in there, then we'll have a draw process on June 7. Each caucus, if they'd like and if they don't trust Giovana, I guess, can send a witness, a scrutineer, to oversee that when it's drawn. She'll send out the exact process and how that will all work.

Again, I would note that spouses and partners are allowed to attend the conference as well.

Could we have a motion? Okay. Ian Donovan.

Mr. Donovan: I'd make the motion that we hold a lottery for anybody that's interested in attending the CCPAC/CCOLA conference. A couple more acronyms in there, if we could, would be great.

The Chair: We need to also move, I think, what Giovana had suggested, that

the chair, the deputy chair, an additional member chosen by lottery, and the committee clerk be approved to attend the 2012 CCPAC/CCOLA conference in Iqaluit, Nunavut . . .

I hope I'm saying that right.

. . . in August and that three alternative attendees also be determined by lottery in the event that any of the approved delegates are unable to attend.

Is that something like you were . . .

Mr. Donovan: That's pretty well what I was trying to sputter out. I've got a bit of a cold today.

The Chair: All right. Any comments before we vote on that? All in favour? Opposed? Unanimously carried.

Upcoming meeting schedule: as discussed and as the motion said, we'll hold it in September. I was thinking the 12th or the 19th. Are there any other suggestions?

Ms Bianchi: If you prefer, I can send out an e-mail.

The Chair: Would you like Giovana to send out an e-mail with a few options, and then you can get back? Would you leave it with the chair to take all the options and pick one of the dates in September? Is that okay?

Mr. Anglin: Do you need a motion for that?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms Calahasen: Except for the 16th to the 19th. We want our researcher to be here.

The Chair: You're not going to be here from the 16th to the 19th?

Dr. Massolin: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Let's do a motion that

Giovana put out a list of possible dates and make sure the 16th to the 19th is not one of them. Then, once we get all that feedback, perhaps you, I, and the deputy chair can make a decision on the date if that's agreeable to everybody. Is that good?

Ms Pastoor: Just pick a date, Rob, and who can come comes, and who can't can't.

The Chair: I'd like a little bit of consultation.

Mr. Anglin: I'll make that motion.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Anglin. Those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Okay. The last piece here. Section 6 of the Legislative Assembly Act permits participation in a committee "by means of telephone or other communication facilities that permit all Members participating in the meeting to hear each other if all the members of the committee consent." The committee rooms, as you know, are equipped to facilitate meeting participation by telephone. Committees have a choice of passing a motion, which needs to be passed unanimously, to approve meeting attendance by telephone for the duration of the Legislature or to move such a motion at the end of a meeting indicating whether participation by telephone will be permitted at the next meeting. Note that a motion to approve teleconference attendance for the duration of the Legislature does not preclude the committee from determining that personal attendance at specific meetings is required.

I as chair want to highly suggest that we pass this motion unanimously for people in Lethbridge, for example, or Lesser Slave Lake who cannot make it. It is a heck of a ride sometimes, and you just never know. There could be a snowstorm. Who knows?

Could somebody move that

for the life of the 28th Legislature the Standing Committee on Public Accounts permit committee members to participate in meetings by teleconference.

Ms Calahasen: Duration of the Legislature?

The Chair: Duration of the 28th Legislature, so we'll only have to do this once.

Mr. Amery: I so move.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Amery. All in favour? Importantly, are there any opposed? No. Carried. All right.

Okay. We need someone to move that this meeting be adjourned. Who would like to move that?

Mr. Hale: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Hale. All those in favour? Opposed? We're out of here at 9:59. There you go. Thank you very much, committee members.

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

