

[Chairman: Mr. Oldring]

[2:02 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, I want to begin by welcoming everyone to this, the 11th session of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. I'm anticipating a very brief meeting this afternoon. Has everyone taken the time to pick up their black binders that Mrs. Quinn so efficiently put together for us?

We can perhaps start by going through the schedule of appearances, and that's under section 1 in your books. The schedule of appearances in front of you is not etched in stone, although I wouldn't like to see an awful lot of changes to it. But if it does pose major problems for any of you, you can let me know, and I'll certainly make every effort to accommodate the changes if at all possible.

MR. McEACHERN: [Inaudible] it's speak now or forever hold your peace in terms of the ones that are set, eh?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right, Mr. McEachern.

Just in summary on the numbers of meetings, to give you a comparison, last year we held a total of 36 meetings. That included seven days on tour. At this point I have a total of 29 meetings in place, but with provision for only one day on tours. We'll come back to tours a little further on the agenda if we can.

The other comment that I would make in respect to the proposed schedule of appearances is that I haven't at this point been able to confirm a time for the Premier to appear. We're certainly working on that, and we'll have that to the committee just as soon as we can confirm a date.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, you're going to discuss tours later? Is that what I understood?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. If we can just discuss the scheduling at this time only.

MR. GOGO: Well, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate all the work you've put into making up this schedule. I know it's not easy to get people to appear, so I commend you for that.

With regard to Thursday, November 12, being as Mr. Speaker, myself, Mr. Bradley, Mr. Hawkesworth, and Mr. Cherry are from out of town, I know that on November 11 events in my riding go pretty late. Would it be possible to reschedule the Provincial Treasurer for 2 to 4 that day, as opposed to 10 till 12?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I can certainly make every effort to accommodate that change, Mr. Gogo, recognizing that the Provincial Treasurer's schedule has been awfully full as well. But certainly if we can accommodate that, we will. I'll make every effort to put it as late as we can that day.

MR. GOGO: Thank you.

MR. McEACHERN: In that regard, it is so important that the Treasurer be here fairly early on that if you can't change it, I suggest you leave it. Like, if he can go in the afternoon, that's fine by me. But don't try to move him to another day and find out it's two weeks before we get him, because he should be early in the hearings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'll take that under consideration.

Thank you.

Any further discussions, then, on the schedule of appearances?

MR. McEACHERN: May I make the point I was going to originally make, because I hadn't anticipated discussion of the Treasurer. I'm thinking about the Premier. I'm noticing that Thursday leaves us Monday and Tuesday, which we had originally scheduled as being potential days for the committee to sit, and I'm wondering if there's any chance that we'll get the Premier on either Monday or Tuesday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Again, I can't say that that's a possibility. I can certainly inquire and . . .

MR. McEACHERN: Not from your point of view, though. Because they're not here, it doesn't mean that you're not still considering those days, I guess.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If that suits the Premier and we're still able to get our committee together, then we'll do it on one of those days if possible.

Any further discussion, then, on the schedule of appearances?

MR. McEACHERN: There's something here about the date of the Auditor General. Is that not going to be early on?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Auditor General is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, November 18, 10 till noon.

Any further discussion? If not, a motion to approve this schedule of appearances? Moved by the Member for Stony Plain.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is there a seconder?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, in this committee we don't need a seconder; just a mover. Any further discussion? If not, I'll call the question. Those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

At this point there is only provision for one day for potential tours. I'm certainly open to the discretion of the members on this matter. Last year we spent seven days on tour. The chairman tried to arrange an irrigation tour a little earlier this year, but we weren't able to get enough members out on a common date. However, I would suggest that the irrigation tour is still being considered for sometime in the spring. There are a number of other possibilities that we might want to consider. The Syncrude project would be a one-day tour. We might want to even combine that with some of the AOSTRA projects. The Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, the Food Processing Development Centre at Leduc, the Pine Ridge Forest Nursery: those are all projects that had been brought to my attention. Certainly there are a number of other projects we might want to consider as well.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, I'd be interested in what the committee feels. If there are 10 or 12 geographic areas where there are investments of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, perhaps as a guide we could consider visiting every place every second

year. In other words, if there are 12, we do six one year, six the next year. Last year we were at Prince Rupert, as I recall; some members of the committee weren't there. We were at Kanas-kis; some members weren't there. Would it be possible to have a formal list of all the geographic areas where there are investments by the fund and the date of the last visit to whichever ones there were, and the committee could then consider. I'd be interested in the views of the members as to which ones we should consider again. You've made some good suggestions, but there could be others. The irrigation tour, in my view, is very important, but it's obviously too late now -- or I assume it's too late now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's too late for the project for this year, but certainly the next reasonable time to tour it would be sometime in the spring.

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Chairman, although I'm not prepared at this point to comment as to my personal preferences or suggestions for heritage-funded projects for the committee to visit, I'd like to make the comment that I found last fall's tours extremely useful, far more useful than I had anticipated. But speaking to the question of frequency or number of visits, if it's a safe assumption that over the course of a four-year term the membership of the committee is reasonably constant, then maybe we should consider some kind of scheduling that would take some or all the committee members to each heritage-funded project once over that four-year period. Or to put it another way, perhaps we at some point should consider a frequency of perhaps three per year, which seems to me more feasible.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Certainly we can provide all the members with a list of the projects that fall under the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, and we'll do that prior to the next meeting.

Any further discussion or suggestions on this?

MR. BRADLEY: Well, I support Mr. Gogo's and the chairman's intention to ensure that we see the irrigation projects. I think that's very important for the committee. I found the tours most useful. The suggestion that we go to Syncrude this year may be one that's very worth while for us to consider. It's something that could be done in one day. There may be other suggestions from other members, but I think we should continue our initiative, the effort to see where the money from the heritage fund has been invested. I found it very valuable, and I tend to agree with Mr. Payne more than Mr. Gogo on the frequency.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. McEACHERN: I'm not sure that we need to get to every facility, but I would certainly think that the irrigation one is one that I would personally find interesting and useful. As to the others, I think we should look at them and decide whether or not there are one or two that seem really important, and keep the number of tours down slightly instead of saying we've got to go to everything. We've been to several already, and I think we could approach it in that manner.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I could just get back in one more time on the subject of proposed tours. From my

recollection, last year the project visits were very helpful and productive, but for me they would have been much more productive had someone been there to refresh my memory or to acquaint me and the other members of the committee with the original rationale for the investment.

It seems to me that when we make one of these one-day visits, it's more like a snapshot, and it's hard to evaluate the snapshot qualitatively without some other term of reference. The objectives that were discussed and contemplated when the original investment decision was made: have they been in fact realized? It's very hard for me as a member to make that kind of judgment without some kind of front-end loading, some kind of information -- albeit a very brief summary -- as to what the original rationale was. It seems to me that might maximize or at least enhance the return to the committee members for the effort of visiting a particular project.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think that's a good suggestion, and again we'll endeavour to provide all members with as much information and material ahead of time for future tours. Any further discussion on that then? If not, we will circulate the list as has been suggested, and the chairman will await feedback and suggestions from the individual members.

MR. McEACHERN: Are we then saying that we'll leave this tentative one-day tour until we see a list and discuss it next time?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We might want to give further consideration to maybe the Syncrude project on that particular day, in that time is becoming somewhat of a factor. If we're going to want to make the necessary arrangements and get the kind of information Mr. Payne has suggested ahead of time, we might want to make a decision on that particular day this afternoon if we can.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Chairman, given that Monday the 16th and Wednesday the 18th will be committee meetings here, I would recommend that if we pick a place to travel to on Tuesday the 17th, it be in the Edmonton area to minimize travel costs. The less time we spend traveling, the more time we can spend actually [not recorded]

MR. BRADLEY: I'd be prepared to move that we tour Syncrude on the 17th.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Were you making that a motion, Mr. McEachern?

MR. BRADLEY: I'm prepared to make a motion that we tour the Syncrude project on the 17th if that's in order.

AN HON. MEMBER: And AOSTRA.

MR. BRADLEY: If there's some other AOSTRA project in the Fort McMurray area that you can fit in, by all means.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any further discussion?

MR. GOGO: Well, perhaps Ann Conroy is in a position to know... I'm thinking of the logistics. Are we thinking of PWA going up, aircraft? Is Fred thinking we'd leave at 7 or 8 in the morning and come back at 7 or 8 at night? Can we do that on a scheduled airline? That might be a complication.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I should tell everyone that Ann Conroy is no longer with us, but we do have Ann Quinn.

MR. GOGO: Leduc could be an alternative. That's a heritage fund project.

MR. BRADLEY: There are two ways of doing it. You could fly into the Fort McMurray airport on a commercial flight and take a bus out to the Syncrude project and back into Fort McMurray, and then back down. I don't know what the schedule is. Or Syncrude has a strip at Mildred Lake you can fly into. If we took a government aircraft, we might be able to fly in there. But it's a gravel strip.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We can maybe explore those possibilities and alternatives and report back.

MR. BRADLEY: [Inaudible] going to have to shave our beards off if we're going to go into the Syncrude plant.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion on that recommendation?

MR. McEACHERN: One point that's important to me. I have a date in Innisfail at 7 o'clock on that Wednesday night. I was wondering if we would be back by then.

MRS. QUINN: I don't think so. When we went last time, I'm sure we arrived back about 7:30 or 8 o'clock at night. The schedule may have changed.

MR. McEACHERN: Actually, I'm all . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: The 17th.

MR. McEACHERN: The 17th? I'm okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Is everyone in agreeance with that motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The only other thing I wanted to do today is just to confirm that the intention of the Chair is to follow the past practice of this committee. I think the format we utilized last year worked very efficiently and effectively, and I appreciated the co-operation all members extended. I'll just remind everyone that it made provisions for one question with two supplementaries. As chairman I will continue to refrain from voting unless there is a tie. Again, I'll vote, but I won't give my reason. Any discussion on format?

MR. BRADLEY: I move that we adopt the same rules as we did in the previous year's hearings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? All those in agreeance?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I think that concludes the agenda for this afternoon, unless there are any other matters members might want to bring up at this time. If not, a motion for adjournment would be in order.

MR. CHERRY: So move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Mr. Cherry. Thanks very much. We'll see everybody on Thursday, November 12. If I can change that to the afternoon, we'll certainly do that.

AN HON. MEMBER: Unless there's going to be a meeting with the Premier.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right.

MR. GOGO: We don't know about that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right. At this moment the next meeting is scheduled for November 12, and the chairman is still endeavouring to confirm a schedule of appearance for the Premier.

MR. GOGO: What about the 9th and 10th?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question was: if the Premier is available on the 9th and 10th, would the committee be prepared to meet? I said that I would explore that as a possibility.

MR. BRADLEY: Can you advise us, at the earliest . . .

MR. GOGO: When will we know?

MR. McEACHERN: If we can't know by Friday, I don't think we want to know, do we?

MR. GOGO: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you haven't heard by Friday noon, then Thursday, November 12. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 2:20 p.m.]

