

[Chairman: Mr. Martin]

[10:03 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe we will get started. The purpose of this meeting is basically organizational, to go over the rules and get an idea of the direction we want to take in the next few weeks.

Before we get into that, my understanding is that two sets of minutes have to be approved: one that you had a long time ago, November 23, and in just the last day or so, I believe, the minutes from November 30. I know some of the new members will not be aware of them, but were there any errors or omissions in those minutes? Seeing none, all those in favour of approving them?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, it's agreed.

Because there are new members here on Public Accounts, what I'd like to do first of all is introduce the Auditor General, Mr. Rogers, have him introduce his staff member who is here with him today and, if he just wants to make a couple of quick comments, that would be quite in order.

MR. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce Mr. Neil Henkelman, an assistant Auditor General, sitting to my right.

I presume, Mr. Chairman, that the committee will be asking me to go through the report, very quickly perhaps, in subsequent meetings, and I'll be very happy to do that. The other thought is that in selecting those departments to be brought before them, perhaps the committee might consider that those be co-ordinated with matters of concern in the report. It's just a suggestion for the consideration of the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

What I'd like to do now, if we could, is just clarify and go through the rules we operated under in the last session to see if they're appropriate, if members of Public Accounts want to follow the same sorts of rules. First of all, the time we have traditionally had, I guess for many years, is that during session we meet every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. I'll throw it out. Is it acceptable to continue that practice?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Moving right along. When we have people we are questioning, the tradition again has been — and I've been relatively loose with the time; I would like as much as possible to keep the flow, but we'll keep within direction — that because there are a lot of people we've allowed a questioner one question and two supplementaries. That's been the practice in the past. It's basically open to you. Is that practice again acceptable for the next session?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. One question, two supplementaries. I might point out that the two supplementaries don't have to be related. We are really saying that you have three questions.

Sometimes it's hard to get back in when there are a number of people.

The tradition has been that while an opposition member is the chairman of Public Accounts, there is a vice-chairman from the government. Last time it was Mr. Moore. Is Mr. Moore still the vice-chairman?

MR. R. MOORE: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. He said yes, so I'll take the vice-chairman's word on that.

In terms of bringing witnesses before Public Accounts, the other tradition has been that we would alternate between government and opposition. Is that still okay with Public Accounts members?

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman, with the exception, I guess, that if there is not a government member available we wouldn't be limited to one question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. So we'll continue with that practice then?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In terms of the schedule ahead, we'll start with our regular Wednesday meetings next week, April 11. What we have done in the past is go through the Auditor General's recommendations with him section by section. This would be this book for the year ended March 31, 1983. So we have an understanding of it before we bring witnesses, I suggest that this would probably be a good procedure to follow. Last time I believe it took us two meetings to do that, but it's however long it takes. Is that agreeable to everybody?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I might also point out that if people do not have a copy or have lost it or something, we have some extra ones here they can pick up.

MR. SZWENDER: A copy, please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. They're just over here, if people want to pick them up quickly. Hopefully we have enough; if not, we can get some more. Does everybody who needs one have a copy now? No other copies needed? Okay.

In terms of looking ahead, after we go through the Auditor General's report — it's not a decision we have to make today, but I think we should decide a couple of things. Number one, there was some request, I believe by Mr. Pahl, that in my discussions going to Public Accounts meetings I had suggested a way I thought Public Accounts could be more effective in the future. If we want to spend some time taking a look at that, that's fine. We can do that. What we should also do is think of the people we want to bring in — which ministers — as witnesses in the next three or four weeks, because often they have difficult schedules. We sometimes have to intermingle the two. Maybe I'll leave it with Mr. Moore. If we could get maybe two or three government people, ministers, that you want to bring in, I'll do the same

with the opposition. Then we can begin to figure out the schedule.

In the meantime, after we go through the report with the Auditor General, if people want to talk about looking at the role of Public Accounts, that's acceptable too. Mr. Moore, maybe you could also bring that back with a recommendation.

That's basically the business I have. Are there any other matters that people would like to bring up?

MR. PAHL: Is it your intention to get into the Auditor General's report on his report this morning or at the next meeting?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I was going by tradition. We could certainly do it. I'm available until 11:30. My intention was to make this an organizational one, and then start heavy-duty work on the 11th, but I'm amenable to . . .

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman, I would certainly concur with that. But because it's a departure from what we've done before, I wonder if I could just ask the Auditor General if he might elaborate briefly on his suggestion that we may want to co-ordinate our calling of departments with matters in the report. I didn't quite get the import of what he meant, although I certainly agree that the committee study of the report will point to a direction that is perhaps not apparent by an individual member's review of the report.

MR. ROGERS: Mr. Chairman, there wasn't a particular significance. In other words, I wasn't looking for the calling of a particular department or anything like that. It was more a matter of principle.

I'm in a rather particular position whereby I comment on the actions and activities of departments, provincial agencies, and other entities, and it seems a matter of fairness that they have their chance to present their side of the case. I try to be as fair as I can. In particular instances where there is a concern, on reading the report, it may be better that the committee delve, in effect, a little more deeply into the matter and get the views of the people who are the subject of the particular item in the report.

This is the way in which public accounts committees operate in some other jurisdictions but not in all. It seems to be quite effective, to the point where sometimes, in the case of the federal Public Accounts Committee, they make recommendations to the House in their report that in most cases sustain the Auditor but not in all cases. There have been cases where they have said they felt that maybe the Auditor wasn't exactly on the ball on that particular item, and they sustained the department. That happened in the case of the discussions on the income tax gap. The Auditor General was saying the gap should be calculated, and the department presented a case with a contrary view to the Public Accounts Committee, and the committee sided with the department. That is just one example.

That was the suggestion I was making to the committee for their consideration. That would simply be one of the inputs, one of the considerations taken into account, among the inputs they consider in determining which particular department or agency they should call before them as witnesses.

MR. PAHL: Thank you, Mr. Rogers. I guess that would lead me to comment on our decision on who we would ask to bring next meeting. Our vice-chairman didn't comment on it, but I would express the view that perhaps we may be able to line up two or three but with the reservation that as we have an emphasis, I guess, from the Auditor General on where he thinks there's some interest, we as a committee may want to review our assessments as to who we would call and in what order, subject again to scheduling. I guess I would say that we as a committee should perhaps express some preference for one, two, or three departments next week, but let's not cast it in stone.

MR. MARTIN: Yes. It's hard to cast them in stone anyhow, because of the commitment. But if we just get a number of people you think you might want, then I can begin to work out a schedule on it. I think what the Auditor General is saying is that in our review of the Auditor General's report, it may come about that all of a sudden you want to change your mind and say it is more important that we look at this department. I think we have that flexibility to do that.

Any other matters? Seeing none, I guess the only other item of business is what we all appreciate — adjournment. All those in favour of adjournment?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. MARTIN: Okay. We'll see you next Wednesday at 10 o'clock.

[The meeting adjourned at 10:16 a.m.]