

[Chairman: Mr. Pashak]

[11:02 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I'd like to call this first meeting of the Public Accounts Committee of the province of Alberta to order for this session of the Legislature. I'd like to welcome everyone here today; nice to see you again. And I'd like to welcome our guest, Mr. Don Salmon. I have an agenda that I think has been distributed. Take a minute to look it over. Is there a motion to approve the agenda as distributed?

MR. BRADLEY: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Moved by Mr. Bradley. Is there any discussion? Are you agreed that we adopt the agenda, then, as distributed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: First item on the agenda is a discussion of schedules for meetings. Last year we met at 10 o'clock on Wednesday mornings in this Chamber. Would anyone care to move a motion to give us some direction as to when we might meet?

MS LAING: I'll move that we meet at 10 on Wednesday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Wednesday mornings? There's a motion now before us. Is there any discussion on the motion?

MR. R. MOORE: Could we hear the motion again?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That we meet Wednesday mornings at 10 o'clock in this Chamber. Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. Okay.

Now, the next item of business on the agenda is the selection of witnesses to appear before the committee. It's traditional to invite Mr. Salmon to at least the first full meeting of the committee and perhaps, if there's need, to invite him to the first two meetings. Is there a motion with respect to Mr. Salmon? Mr. Moore.

MR. R. MOORE: Yes, I'd like to make a motion that we have Mr. Salmon appear before us for the number of days required to go over his report. Is it in order to add on various ministers we'd like to see appear before us now, or another motion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would it be all right with you if we dealt with that in two motions: deal with Mr. Salmon and then talk about the order of ministers? Okay. So the motion before us as moved by Mr. Moore is that we invite Mr. Salmon to appear before the committee for as many days as we need to interview him. Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. All right. Then we could move on to your second item of business, Mr. Moore.

MR. R. MOORE: Mr. Chairman, I make a motion that we have the following departments and their ministers responsible appear

before the committee: Department of the Environment, Hon. Ken Kowalski; Department of Economic Development and Trade, Hon. Larry Shaben; Department of Agriculture, Hon. Peter Elzinga; Department of Advanced Education, Hon. Dave Russell; Attorney General and Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, Hon. J. Horsman; Provincial Treasurer, Hon. Dick Johnston; Department of Transportation and Utilities, Hon. Al Adair; Department of Hospitals and Medical Care, Hon. Marvin Moore; Department of Recreation and Parks, Hon. Norman Weiss; Department of Technology, Research and Telecommunications, Hon. Les Young; Department of Energy, Hon. Neil Webber; and the Solicitor General, Hon. Ken Rostad. I'll provide you with a copy of that list, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a motion before the committee. Is there any discussion on that motion?

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MS LAING: I suggest we add to the list the Department of Social Services, number 1.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Social Services to the top of the list? I would accept that as an amendment to the motion as presented by Mr. Moore. Is there any discussion on the amendment, which is to the effect . . .

MR. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, I don't mind the amendment to the extent that I have no difficulty with having the Minister of Social Services in, but I think we might consider putting the minister down the list a little bit: second, third, fourth. I think I would prefer to have the Minister of the Environment here first, considering some of the concerns some of us have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Nelson, I think I've just seen some sort of concurrence from the mover of the motion that second would be acceptable to her. Is that . . .

MR. NELSON: I think she could get support for having the Department of Social Services come in, and she might want to adjust her amendment to bring it into third or fourth spot there, and I think we could all support that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would third spot be all right with you?

MS LAING: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. On the amendment, which is that we move Social Services into the third spot, is there an agreement?

MR. MITCHELL: Could I just ask: does that mean that economic development goes automatically to the fourth?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay.

MR. R. MOORE: The other rotation just drops down one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Then on the main motion, are you agreed that we accept the order as presented by Mr. Moore?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fine. Is there any other business? Mr. Bradley.

MR. BRADLEY: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move that the Public Accounts Committee meetings be held during the period the Legislative Assembly is in session in this fiscal year. I understand that the Members' Services Committee's budget has gone forward and there are not funds necessary in that budget for us to meet when the House isn't sitting, so I'd like to move that motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, okay. I'll accept it, but I don't think we need it, because there are no funds or provisions for us to meet outside of session, so technically we can only meet in session. But there's a motion of the floor.

AN HON. MEMBER: You need a seconder on the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, I don't think we need seconders. We don't need seconders in committees, so I'll accept Mr. Bradley's motion and then we'll have discussion on it.

MR. MITCHELL: I, of course, am adamant in my position that the Public Accounts, of all the Legislative Assembly standing committees, should be the committee that meets between sessions. I believe it isn't correct to say that because the budget hasn't been approved by Members' Services Committee, we therefore have to give up all hope of having the money to meet between sessions.

There are a couple of possible ways that we could do that. One outstanding possibility is that the Legislature still has to debate this. If everybody in this Public Accounts Committee got up in the appropriate session and said, "We on the Public Accounts Committee believe that the Legislature would be making a mistake not to approve funds and not to overrule Members' Services Committee," then we could probably have some influence in that regard. Secondly, we might just meet without causing the Legislative Assembly to pay for our meeting. I don't need \$100 a day to meet. Now, admittedly it's easier for me to get here, but I think we might consider that we drive in, make our way in, hold these meetings on days when the Conservative caucus meets anyway, and they get the funds to come in to their caucus meeting, and meet at 10 o'clock that night. I don't care.

It is too important a committee and it is too important a time for the Public Accounts not to meet. This committee passed a resolution last year to have meetings between sessions, and I believe it behooves us to sustain that position in any way that we can, whether in the Legislature, and if that doesn't work to get funds, then we should just donate our time and donate our travel expenses in order to make this committee work properly. It is an integral part of the accountability process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Mitchell. We have, though, a motion on the floor which would direct the committee to just meet during session.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm speaking against that motion, and I'm

asking the committee members to reconsider that motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any further discussion?

MS LAING: I would also like to speak against the motion. I believe that we do need to have an in-depth study of each department. We have 13 or 14 here; that's four months in the Legislature for 14 weeks, and that means there are 10 other departments that we don't have an opportunity to look at, and I certainly have other departments I would like to add to this list.

MR. ADY: I'd like to speak to the motion. I think that we're asking for cutbacks in efficiencies throughout the economy that are funded by the government, and I think it behooves us to take a look at what we might be spending. The hon. member made mention that perhaps we could donate our travel expenses. That's well and good, and I'm prepared to donate to some extent, but a trip to Edmonton and an overnight costs probably \$500 to get me here from where I am and to stay over and pay my expenses, which is a considerable donation that I think would wreak some hardship. I have a little trouble with that.

I think that we could look at building some more efficiency into what we do in these hearings. We could start them earlier in the session. We could perhaps take a look at having our questions prepared ahead of time and not spend so much time on rhetoric and move them through quicker. We could see more departments. There's also the possibility of a fall session, which hasn't been determined yet, in which case we could convene the committee at that time. If we worked a little smarter at this thing, I think we could satisfy many of the concerns that the hon. member has to have more of these departments before us. So in view of the economics facing the Legislature at this particular time, I think I support the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'd just like to make one comment, if I may, on your remarks, Mr. Ady. We could not meet earlier during this session; we had to wait until the committee structure was approved by the Assembly itself. So today is the first day on which we could meet legally. Further comment from Mr. Mitchell.

MR. MITCHELL: I appreciate what Mr. Ady is saying. Certainly it is an economic hardship. Again, I would like to emphasize the point that you do meet reasonably regularly as a caucus and that you have to come in anyway, so we might be able to work something out there. But maybe a compromise proposal or something for people to think about would be that we should, as a committee, endorse the objective, the fundamental role, of this committee as being the review of each and every department that is reported in the Public Accounts. I think if we set that objective and then we worked using every possible moment that we can during the spring session -- if we find that the fall session sits, we get extra time then. But if we don't have enough time during those two periods of time, we have to find some contingency, some other way to ensure that we have fulfilled our responsibility in reviewing every department.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bradley, did you want to close debate on this issue?

MR. BRADLEY: I'd like to close debate, if I could, since I didn't speak at length in terms of the introduction. I think we have to be fiscally responsible, and I think we have to, in terms of the

budget that we have, only meet when the House is in session. I think that in terms of the past traditions of this committee, we have examined half of the estimates in one year and half of the estimates in another.

We have to recognize that we're reviewing past expenditure. In a lot of cases when we get into discussion of public accounts, we keep ourselves just to reviewing past expenditure. We could probably move a lot quicker, but we often get into policy issues which are current to date, and we often stray from the job we're supposed to be doing. I'm not aware, and I could be corrected, in terms of other Legislatures, whether they examine in detail every single department. They usually target them so that they can make use of their time, and I think that a critical examination of the past expenditure over a two-year period of every department is something that we can achieve. We also have the benefit of the Auditor General's report, which zeroes in on deficiencies in terms of his exploration of going through those accounts.

So I think we can accommodate and accomplish a lot of work if we focus ourselves in on the job that we're supposed to do, and within a two-year period we can review the public accounts of every department.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are you ready for the question? Those in favour of the motion? Those opposed? Motion carried. Date of next meeting?

MR. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, I just have a question whether we should reconfirm the manner in which we ask questions and subquestions insofar as we were doing with one question and two each time we were offered the opportunity. Will we continue that type of a line of questioning, so that one or two members can't take the period and exclusively have the floor during our deliberations?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Last time we permitted each member to have three questions. Then if that [member] wanted to pursue further questions, his name went to the bottom of the list. And if there was time and opportunity, he would get back in. Is there a motion?

MR. NELSON: I just want to confirm that that would be the same procedure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Perhaps we'd better do that by way of a motion.

MR. R. MOORE: Well, so I can speak to the motion, I'll make the motion that we continue our practice of the Chair recognizing the questions as they arise, first come, first basis. They ask one question, two supplementals, and then come in at the bottom of the speaking list if they want to get in a second time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you putting that as a motion?

MR. R. MOORE: I'm putting that as a motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Is there any discussion on the motion?

MR. ADY: For clarification, is that where we were at last year? Is that the procedure?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. ADY: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Are you ready for the question? Those in favour of the motion as presented by Mr. Moore? Those opposed? Motion carried.

Any further items under other business? Then the last question on the agenda is the date of the next meeting.

MR. NELSON: Next Wednesday, 10 o'clock.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Mr. Nelson that we meet next Wednesday at 10 o'clock and that we invite the Auditor General. That's already been dealt with.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion?

MR. JONSON: Just a comment, Mr. Chairman, that perhaps the timing should be checked with Private Bills, because that's set for 9. Oh, 8:30. Oh sorry, right; they moved it up to 8:30. My apologies. We're okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: My information is that it's already been checked, but I spoke to Mr. Stan Schumacher the other day. All right. Those in favour of the motion that we meet next Wednesday at 10 o'clock in this Chamber?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion carried.

A motion to adjourn would then be in order. So moved by Mr. Nelson. Those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[The committee adjourned at 11:19 a.m.]

