

8:32 a.m.

Wednesday, September 15, 1993

[Chairman: Mrs. Abdurahman]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could I call us to order, please. I welcome you to the first Public Accounts meeting of this session. Before I ask for an approval of the agenda, I'd like to introduce staff who are support to this committee. To my left is Corinne Dacyshyn. She's the key to our success in having the information on a timely basis. Thank you, Corinne. To my right is Frank Work, the Parliamentary Counsel, who I'm relying on to keep me out of parliamentary difficulties.

At this time I now want to ask for an approval of the agenda, please. Moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper. All in favour? Against? It's carried.

I'd like to make a few remarks under Chairman's Remarks. Public Accounts Committees have been put in place historically to ensure that there's fiscal integrity within government expenditures. The Alberta Public Accounts Committee should indeed be serving that purpose. It should be fully accountable back to Albertans through the Assembly, and one of the areas where integrity and credibility has to happen, whether it be in the province of Alberta, across Canada, or in other parts of the world, is that it indeed should be a nonpartisan committee. We should all be serving on the Public Accounts Committee for the same reason, to ensure that we have full accountability and fiscal integrity.

I'd also draw to your attention the Auditor General's recommendations - and I'm pleased that Mr. Salmon is with us this morning; he'll get a more formal introduction in a few minutes - and also the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' recommendations. I find it rather sad as an Albertan and a chairman of this committee to see that we're second from the bottom in implementing those recommendations. I would suggest as an Albertan that this has to happen if we are actually going to have credence and ensure fiscal integrity for the moneys that rightfully are Albertans'. I also am going to be asking Corinne to copy an article that I have. It's from the CPA 33rd conference, and it's dealing with comments from international representatives, dealing with the primary functions of Parliament. One of the primary functions, of course, is to scrutinize public expenditure. I won't say any more about that. I think I would ask you all to read as much of this document as you possibly can when you get it.

So, Corinne, I'd appreciate if at some time that could be circulated.

The legislative authority that we have is under Standing Order 50, and I hope you've all referred to that. Basically what it is saying is that this committee has the power to create its own mandate. It's certainly not laid out within the Standing Orders. The powers of the committee are that it conducts its business in conjunction with the recommendations of the Auditor General, which I've mentioned already in my opening remarks. On your agenda you'll see the reference pages and also the reference pages for the Canadian Public Accounts Committees.

I would like to acknowledge the Member for . . . I'm going to have to ask you to assist me.

MRS. BURGNER: No problem. Calgary-Currie.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Yes. If I may at this time, I want to respond to the Standing Order 50 and just agree that we're all in concurrence with that standing order. Perhaps you might want to

highlight a couple of the points that you think are germane. I got the sense that possibly you wanted to revisit that. Or are we all in concurrence with it? I think it's important that we all know the mandate we're operating under. If you wouldn't mind, just for some of us, to highlight a few of those issues.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, as you all know, Standing Order 50 states: "Public Accounts, when tabled, shall automatically stand referred to the Public Accounts Committee." I think that's very straightforward. In essence, what it leaves the ability of this committee in this organizational meeting is indeed to set its mandate in how we are going to conduct ourselves over the next number of months. Is that correct, Frank? Would you like to add to my comments?

MR. WORK: No. Just in the general sense. The chairman's quite right: committees are internally self-governing. You have a very broad standing order of referral to this committee, so you quite correctly can conduct your business as you see fit. You have to remember, I suppose, that the only limit on you is that a committee is a creature of the House. Ultimately, that's where your authority flows from, and that's who you're accountable to. Certainly in terms of the power of the committee, your power is in terms of your ability to report back to the House.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Frank.

MRS. BURGNER: A supplementary question. That was my clarification. In your remarks about setting a mandate, I had a sense that there was an interest in expanding or changing the role of the Public Accounts Committee, but I think I'm hearing clarification that any responsibilities and any commitments we make as a committee are brought back into the House, that that is where our authority lies: in reporting to the House. That, I believe, has now been clarified.

Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

At this time I would like to introduce Mr. Salmon, the Auditor General for the province of Alberta. He has a staff member with him this morning, which I'd ask you, Mr. Salmon, to please introduce.

MR. SALMON: Thank you very much. It seems like it's time to start Public Accounts meetings again. It's something we've been doing for a number of years. I have with me today Andrew Wingate, senior Assistant Auditor General of the office of the Auditor General. We're happy to be here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Welcome, Mr. Wingate.

Would you like to speak to your recommendations now, Mr. Salmon?

MR. SALMON: Madam Chairman, I'm not sure exactly what you're looking for at this stage. I thought maybe there'd be a little bit more discussion with the committee. I have an introductory comment on recommendation 6 which I could give, or I could also talk about the annual report, but I'm not sure you're there with the agenda yet to talk about the 1991-92 report. I haven't heard any comment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly we can leave your comments until the appropriate time, then, in the agenda.

Committee Funding, Approved Budget Estimates 1993-94. Do you have a copy before you? There was certainly a copy sent out by Corinne in your package with regard to the budget.

MR. MAGNUS: Madam Chairman, if you're asking us if we have a copy of the agenda, I believe we all have a copy of the agenda.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Also included in that package was the budget. Has no one got it?

MRS. BURGNER: Excuse me. Do you have a copy, just to hold it up?

MR. COUTTS: I don't have it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You don't. They certainly were all sent out in the package.

The gentleman - Mr. Lund, the Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Yes. I have the . . . But I'm wondering what it is you want relative to the '93-94 budget. Are you looking for approval of this budget?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No. All we're wanting to draw to members' attention: we're very limited when it comes to a budget, and it fits in with the discussion of committee allowances paid to members. The past Public Accounts Committee had a motion before them that the committee does not claim its honorarium, so it was important that one did look at the budget. I have it in front of me here. The estimate for '93-94 is \$18,504. The estimate for '92-93 was . . . Sorry. Sine?

MR. CHADI: Madam Chairman, I think it would be appropriate perhaps, if some of the members don't have a copy of that with them, that maybe we can quickly make some copies and distribute them. I'm one of the guilty ones that knows full well that I got it. It's in my office, but I failed to bring it.

MR. MAGNUS: I think that's an excellent suggestion, because frankly I'm not prepared to talk about something I don't have.

8:42

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Actually, members, when you get these large packets that are coming from the secretary, it's important that you do your homework so you pull out what's appropriate for the committee.

MR. MAGNUS: But if you don't know you're supposed to have it and it doesn't appear, then it's real hard to do your homework.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, there must be something wrong with the system then, because my clear understanding was that every member of this Public Accounts Committee got a full package from the secretariat . . . [interjection] Thank you.

MRS. BURGNER: Madam Chairman, I think the confusion lies in the fact - and I think you have to beg indulgence of some of the new members. A package of the information was circulated, and it's certainly noted on the covering sheet as to what is there. However, the need for all these documents at this meeting is the part we're a little uncertain of. Now there's a better understanding, but if you look at the memo that was sent out with nine numbered items on the agenda, there's no indication that these

documents, some or all, would be needed in the morning's meeting. I think you'll have to just beg the indulgence of some of us who are novices and clarify that point.

So if we have to just wait a few minutes while we get the budget estimates so we can have a fair and appropriate debate on it, I think that's probably appropriate at this moment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I won't have any difficulty with that. I'll speak to Corinne, and what we'll do in future agendas is clearly next to the agenda item identify what documents you should have with you at the committee meeting. So you can relax for a few minutes until we get the budget estimates.

I see that Corinne is circulating the budget estimates. I'd like also at this time to clearly state that as chairman I accept the responsibility, because it's been my experience since I've met Corinne that she does a first-class job. So I'll make it more clear in the future what should be up front that you bring to these meetings.

Hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Madam Chairman, I don't think anyone was knocking Corinne or anyone else. It's just as the Member for Calgary-Currie had indicated, that perhaps because there are so many new members, we weren't aware that you'd be dealing with all these things in depth. Perhaps that's why. It's certainly no slam at Corinne.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I really appreciate that comment.

Hon. member.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm one of those rookie members, and new members would ask that you consider going through the budget line by line, please.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's not an extensive budget, and it's been approved already. I think the main number that you have to look at is what this . . .

MRS. FRITZ: Does that mean, Madam Chairman, that you're saying no?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, I'm not saying that at all. If you'd allow me to finish, the bottom line is: we have had approval for an expenditure of \$18,504. I think every member should be aware of that. It was approved in April by the previous chairman, who defended the budget before the Members' Services Committee.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you. You will be going through it line by line?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If that's the wish of the body.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you.

MS CARLSON: Madam Chairman, just before we get into discussion on the budget, I'd like to discuss the time and hours that we meet. It seems to me that this committee has a great deal of work to do, and I'm concerned that if we just meet from 8:30 to 10, that won't be enough time to adequately cover what we've got to deal with. I'd like to move that we meet on Tuesdays instead of Wednesdays and between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order. I thought we were talking about the budget, not the times we meet. It seems to me the point of order should be we're on the budget and times we meet should be under another heading. The schedule should be under another heading as opposed to budget.

8:52

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You're quite correct, member.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So I certainly am prepared to go through this line by line if that's the wish of the majority. Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Is it possible to make a general comment before we start line by line?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I got elected, and one of the things was fiscal responsibility and making cuts. So I think as we go through this line by line, we can show our fiscal responsibility in this committee by cutting some of our own expenses. So when I'm going through this, that's what I'll be looking at for instance.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Likewise. The chairman I think has demonstrated that by signing that I will not be collecting my honorarium or taking the benefits that come by this position.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Also, I will hold your motion till after we've discussed this.

MS CARLSON: Thank you.

MR. CHADI: Once we're going through this, Madam Chairman, would you entertain motions as we go through the document, then, line by line? If we find something that . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think the point we're trying to make is that this budget is a given, and I'd ask a legal counsel to speak to it. I wasn't trying as chairman to bypass a democratic process. The previous chairman had stood before the appropriate committee and justified this budget. We cannot change that. That's a parliamentary reality. How we expend these dollars is certainly within our ability.

Hon. member Stelmach.

MR. STELMACH: Madam Chairman, I think if we proceed through the budget, whether this budget was passed prior to the election or not, there are items in here that are really items that we won't be expending based on what you said previously and based on the general direction this House has taken.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think that would be most appropriate so that we can make informed decisions how we wish to see this budget expended within our legislative ability.

So who would wish to address Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits? Sine.

MR. CHADI: Thank you. I think in light of the people of the province of Alberta who expect us to be fiscally responsible with the affairs of the province and the dollars of the province, I'm going to suggest, first of all, that we move that all committee members unanimously agree to renounce committee fees. I understand that the chairman, yourself, has agreed not to take any chair fees.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not prepared to accept a motion at this time. I think it's violating the spirit of the agreement that we wanted to go through the budget and discuss it. Then we will deal with motions.

Pearl.

MS CALAHASEN: A question more for clarification, Madam Chairman. Regarding the allowances and supplementary benefits as well as the travel expenses that are paid to Members of the Legislative Assembly, it was my understanding - and I've been on this committee for a long time - that there were no payments to be made to any MLAs. I just want a point of clarification as to who took those benefits and who received the payments from the Leg. Assembly regarding these public accounts, more for clarification rather than anything. My understanding was that there were no payments made to any MLAs, and I just want to know who would have taken them. When you look to 715A00, \$8,874, Allowances and Supplementary Benefits of \$800, and Travel Expenses, I'm not exactly sure who would have claimed those amounts.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just on that point, this that we're looking at is a budget. As far as I understand - I'm agreeing with Ms Calahasen - I don't believe any members claimed the amount. However, under the Members' Services agreement because there is an allowance that it is possible that members could claim, there has to be a budget that allows for payments to be made. What this suggests is that there's a budget, as I understand it, that money could be paid, not money that has been paid. My understanding is in fact that you are correct, that no members of the previous Public Accounts Committee, of which I was a member, did make any claims. However, that's not to say members could not claim if they so chose.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Member Lund.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thought we were on Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits. I beg your indulgence to move back to that and explain to the members what that line is all about. We've wandered off into this whole issue about payment to members, and that clearly falls down under Other Expenditures. So would you please go back and explain to the members what line 711F00 is, please?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly. I'm sure that Corinne can make us informed as to what that is dealing with.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Basically the item on Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits solely relates to the attendance of two delegates and one staff member at the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' meeting, which is held in the summer each year. It's a \$200 expenditure per person, and that's all that amounts to. The pay to members comes into another area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any further questions specifically on Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits? The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Would you just assist me in looking where the actuals are? I see the estimates, but I'm interested in the actuals from last year.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If you look at the '92-93 forecast, you will see the actuals there. For example, it was estimated in '92-93 at \$1,500. The bottom line was \$41,525, and the actual was \$16,540. So the actual actually expended less than was budgeted for.

MRS. FRITZ: So the forecast is the actual?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. FRITZ: Okay. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any further questions on Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits? If not, I believe we had a question from Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman, but it comes under Other Expenditures, and I'll wait until we get to that moment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there nothing further under Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits?
Supplies and Services. Any questions or points?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Just a question. There seems to be an excessive amount of Travel Expenses budgeted for, \$14,761. I'm wondering if somebody could tell me what that is supposed to be budgeted for.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That was last year's estimate. This year's estimate is \$7,980.

DR. L. TAYLOR: What would that be for?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm assuming it would be the conference. I should point out to the members that there was a conference in July that I was informed about and could have attended based on past procedures. I declined that. I didn't think that it was appropriate for Alberta taxpayers' money being spent going to Toronto.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess in light of that comment that you've made – and I applaud you for having exercised that restraint from a fiscal point of view – it seems to me that an awful lot of committee work is tied up to going to the annual conventions, and simply because this is a new process for me, I'm curious about whether or not this committee should not make a recommendation or review materials that have been covered from past conventions, the effect and the ability for committee members to be better prepared for this kind of committee work based on the attendance at the annual conventions.

My sense is that if we are going to deal with these things as a committee, we would be better off having an orientation amongst ourselves with the experienced people that are paid for by the province of Alberta and who work for us here in Edmonton.

Perhaps we should entertain a motion to not have past practice be the rule of the day. We should take some initiative here and say that we believe we are capable within this House to have the best expertise available, and consequently further attendance at these annual conventions would be only on a needs basis and reviewed annually; it is not something we automatically do. If it's appropriate at this time to entertain that motion, I would do so, or if my colleagues would feel more comfortable entertaining that after they've had a look at the material from the convention, the kinds of recommendations that come forward, perhaps if they have specific concerns of western Canadian provinces or provinces with similar types of accounting practices. I'm just giving you some leeway as chairman to say, "Why don't you look at what's happened before you make that decision?" But I'd ask the House: would they prefer to entertain a motion at this point?

9:02

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The chair wouldn't entertain a motion unless there's agreement that we have finished what we agreed to do in going over the budget estimates. I have two motions before the floor that have been held.

MRS. BURGNER: So our motion should come at the end?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, that was the gentleman's agreement. We wanted the budget to be reviewed, and I don't want to cut off that discussion if someone feels there's still further discussion that should happen.

Hon. member Mr. McFarland.

MR. MCFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just back on this Travel Expense for one moment. I respect the fact that you didn't attend the conference in July, I believe it was, but in actual fact I don't know that you would have anyways because it's my understanding that none of us were members of Public Accounts until we went into session. So I would hesitate to give you credit for something that you couldn't have done anyways.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't have any problem with that. It was my understanding from the administration that the ability was there. If that is not the case, then I certainly acknowledge that. I'm certainly glad that as chairman I have foresight knowing where you don't spend public dollars.

Is there any further discussion? Danny.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Madam Chairman, I'm sitting here listening to the comments, and we have a total budget of \$18,000 here. I would hate to think that we're going to blow our brains out talking about \$18,000 all morning. I am respectful of the comments that are made, but it is \$18,000. We do have a lot bigger fish to fry. If we have some comments here, fine, let's get on with them, but I think the amount of time that it looks like we're going to spend on this budget here is out of line.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Dr. Taylor.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, I would comment on that. I don't think it's out of line at all. We're talking about a matter of principle here. We've got to set the agenda, and we've got to set the principle, and we've got to set the procedure by example. I agree \$18,000 is a very little amount of money, but the point is: it's an example. I was elected to set an example. For instance, when I was appointed as chairman of the Alberta Research Council, I already had said that I would not drive a government car, because

I'm elected to set an example. Eighteen thousand dollars is not a big amount of money, but it is an example.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: No, I had already made my comments.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess it's just how you look at it, because to me \$18,000 is still significant.

What I'm interested in next is the insurance. I'd like to ask a question about what it is we're insuring.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Can I acknowledge two other members? Then we'll go back to that.

Dr. Percy.

DR. PERCY: I'm really gratified to see this interest in scrutiny, particularly when we were going over the interim supply for \$8.6 billion and there was a two-day limit on it and a principle that was enunciated and discussed by us in some detail is that we wanted the time to discuss that. I did not hear such comments forthcoming from the other side as we rammed through those interim supply estimates.

MR. MAGNUS: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If you have a point of order, could you please stand to make it?

MR. MAGNUS: Has this got anything to do with public accounts?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The only reason I was asking was because there were so many people speaking at the one time.

Let us keep to the business that's before us, and that is perusing the budget. The next member was the Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I do agree that \$18,000 is not a considerable amount of money when we speak of great numbers as we do in this Legislature, although I do agree with the members that it is significant inasmuch as we're discussing here the principle of the \$18,500.

Members, please, I think we should bear in mind one thing: that indeed this budget, as we were told earlier by the chairman, was put together by the previous committee. Last year they expended according to this \$16,540, and this year the estimates were \$18,504. Regardless of what they've agreed that we could spend money on in here - being travel expenses, insurance, repairs and maintenance, et cetera, et cetera - it is up to us whether or not we are going to indeed expend those funds. Let us now show fiscal restraint and say, "Fine, you gave us this budget, and we have \$18,504 there." Just watch that by next year when they look at this, they're going to say, "God, were they fiscally responsible; they didn't spend any money at all." So whatever is on here doesn't make a bit of difference. It's going to add up to a hill of beans anyway.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you. I've been on this Public Accounts Committee for a number of years, and I was hoping that it would

take a new twist this year, but I see that it's back to the old thing. Here we are spending a lot of time on \$18,000, and if the issue hadn't been raised, we'd already have finished with the questions relative to this budget. So why are we haggling whether we should be talking about the \$18,000 or not? Let's get into the discussion of the actual numbers that are here. We could be finished with it if we'd got on with it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. As chairman it concerns me, particularly when we've got Mr. Salmon, the Auditor General, waiting to bring I think some sound advice.

I'd like to recognize Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Madam Chairman, I have one question for you. You said that in July you declined to travel to Toronto. As I understand, the other hon. member has raised the point that at that time you were not the chairman; right? I was not a member of the committee at that time; is that correct? You only became chairman in September after the House began to sit; right?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's correct. The point I was making was that it was brought to my attention, and certainly the offer was there, and irrespective of whether I had the legislative responsibility or not at that time, I would have declined it and did decline it when it was brought to my attention.

Any further discussion on the budget? The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Well, I was only drawing to your attention that Yvonne Fritz had asked a question about Insurance, and this is what I was hoping we would get to: these questions relative to this budget.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

With regards to Insurance, Corinne, can you inform us with regards to the \$500 and that these dollars had not been expended in the past year?

MRS. DACYSHYN: There currently is a Members' Services order that allows the chairman of a standing committee to have a vehicle, and that item is for insurance of that vehicle.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The chairman through legislative authority can claim a car as chair of this committee. Because they have that ability, there has to be an allowance made for insurance of that vehicle. The past chairman did not claim a car, so there was no expenditure for the insurance. If the chair this year has a car, there would have to be an allowance of \$500 to ensure that that vehicle was insured. As the chairman is not claiming it, probably that will show a zero. It should show a zero at the end of this fiscal year.

MRS. FRITZ: So, Madam Chairman, would the other benefit of a vehicle be under Travel Expenses, then, or under allowances? Where would that be? Under capital?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Travel Expenses.

MRS. FRITZ: Not under capital. It would just be overall under this.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: My understanding is that it would fall under what was estimated as \$14,000. If you go to your back pages, it will show you back there.

MRS. FRITZ: I see it under travel. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'd like to acknowledge Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just as a point of information for the newer members, if they look at the budget, the first page of course is the summary, and then there is more detail on the subsequent pages. There is a page corresponding to each of the line items. If we take a moment to look at it, perhaps then we could preclude some other questions that may be coming forward. Like the estimate for repairs of \$300 probably won't occur because there is no car, so that will be saved. Also the professional and technical will probably be saved. So many of the details about the budget that are being questioned are included in subsequent pages. Perhaps we could expedite discussion on this budget by simply reading the document before us.

9:12

MR. PHAM: Well, you say Professional, Technical, and Labour Services can be excluded. Does that mean we are not going to pay for any professional service?

MRS. DACYSHYN: The professional/technical item was for the photocopying of the annual report, which will still be there as far as I realize.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there any further discussion on the budget?

MRS. FRITZ: So we're now going into these other pages? Is that correct?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm having difficulty as chairman. If you wish us to take an \$18,000 budget and go through it line by line, I think it will probably take us to 10 o'clock. If that's the wish of the majority, I have to respect that. But it's been pointed out that we've got into very general discussion, and a lot of the expenditures that have been laid out as a possibility will depend on the actions of the Public Accounts Committee.

If there's something that is obviously confusing or you cannot comprehend, I'm sure we can answer those questions. But really they're straightforward. The Chairman's Salary is \$4,200. That's been budgeted. I've stated I'm not claiming that. I've stated I'm not claiming the car. I won't be claiming the travel allowance. So you should be able to go back in this budget and see that those moneys will be freed up for some other purpose. Now, it's up to this body to decide if they wish to continue the practices of the past Public Accounts Committee and not claim an honorarium and travel expenses, that it falls within your legislative salary. That will be the members' decision. With regard to Salaries, Wages, and Employee Benefits, that's not within our prerogative. It's certainly something we would have to justify once again with the next budget year, but we cannot change that. That is a commitment that has to be made by this committee.

Well, what I'd like to do, unless the majority still wants to continue to scrutinize this, is to move on into action from motions.

MRS. FRITZ: Madam Chairman, with all due respect, I had the floor, and I had a question. It didn't relate to your salary or your vehicle. I appreciate what you have to say, but I also hope you'll appreciate what I'm asking. My question had to do with staff, and that is part of this budget. Whether or not I'm to be interested in

that is my decision, and I'm interested in whether or not there are any employees on long-term disability or whether you're anticipating that or any short-term disability. I was looking at LTDI. By the look on your face, there mustn't be. So thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, don't leave it to an interpretation, member, of the look on my face. I'm sure it's one of frustration. I'd ask Corinne to speak to the question you've asked.

MRS. DACYSHYN: The items related to the long-term disability and the pension are built into the salary paid to members for attendance at conferences. We have to put that in. It's an insurance of some sort. That's what it's included for.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: I don't think it is a good idea for us to pass a motion and then go back against our motion. Once we decide we're going to go through this budget line by line, we should keep to it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, continue. Does the body wish to continue to discuss this budget line by line?
Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Are we entertaining motions now, Madam Chairman?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have not had any direction that you want to move into motions. I'm looking for the majority to agree that you've spent sufficient time on a budget of \$18,504 that has already been approved.

MRS. FRITZ: I so move that we go into motions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I beg your pardon?

MRS. FRITZ: I so move that we now have discussion about the motions that might arise from having looked at this.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Is there agreement to that motion? Is there agreement?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

On the agenda, the agenda was approved with regard to Committee Funding under (c), and I would ask that you follow the agenda. The first item that should be up for discussion is the committee allowances paid to members, if anyone wishes to speak to that or move a motion.

Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am looking at this, and I guess I've had the same feeling for years and years and years as an alderman in the city of Calgary. I believe we all get paid for doing this job, and I don't believe you should get extra dollars. I would like to make a motion that recommends to Members' Services that pay to Members of the Legislative Assembly for this committee be taken out or deleted.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, member. We have no legislative ability to do that. I'll ask our legal counsel to speak to it, please.

MR. WORK: Madam Chairman, the committee can do one of two things in terms of allowances. It's certainly within the ability of every member of the committee, as someone else suggested, to simply not claim the allowance. The allowance is an entitlement under the Legislative Assembly Act. This committee obviously can't amend that. But if I may be sort of bold, you could move that the committee recommend to itself that the allowance not be collected. On the other hand, Mr. Magnus's motion – if next year you wanted to recommend to the Members' Services Committee that the allowance structure be changed, I suppose you could do that, but you're stuck with what you've got for now. The immediate remedy is simply not to collect it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So if you would like to reword your motion, I can certainly entertain it.

MR. MAGNUS: I'm sorry. I can't hear you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would you like to reword your motion in light of Parliamentary Counsel's comments?

MR. MAGNUS: Madam Chairman, I'll move a motion, then, that says that members of this committee not accept their remuneration, their daily stipend, whatever it may be here, until . . . When? Give me a date for this fiscal year, then, or something like that.

MR. WORK: It would be preferable that the committee urge or recommend to its members that they not – you really can't bind them not to. It would be a nonbinding motion. It's just a statement of preference.

MR. MAGNUS: How do I word this?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I beg your pardon?

MR. MAGNUS: How do I have to word this, Counsel?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would suggest you word it that there be agreement among all members of this Public Accounts Committee that they will not claim the legislative right to their honoraria.

Do you wish to speak to your motion?

MR. MAGNUS: I think it's been said.
I have another motion, if I may, after this one.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Perhaps to Corinne. Could you give me some history of what's happened in the past. I'm new here, and I'm just wondering: did any members accept this at all in the last fiscal year, and what members from what parties?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't think Corinne has the ability to answer your question.

Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: As an attempt at clarification, if you look at the very last page in your package of information – and my apologies to Ms Calahasen; apparently I wasn't one hundred percent correct. It seems that in meeting attendance there's a figure of \$700, which suggests that last year, over some time,

some person or persons collected \$700. It could have been much higher if, for example, each member here today claimed \$100. We would be up to \$2,000 just for today. I don't know who that was, but it seems like some person or persons did collect some money.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's brought to my attention by legal counsel that one member claimed and then paid it back, and it's something we should all be aware of. Look at what you're signing, because my understanding is that that's in essence what happened: they didn't realize it was for the Public Accounts Committee. I think it was an innocent error on their part. As our legal counsel's telling me, it was fully paid back.

The Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Do you wish to speak to the motion?

MS CALAHASEN: On the . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I was acknowledging you're next on the list, and I was just finding out whether you're speaking to the motion or not.

MS CALAHASEN: As a matter of fact, it's been covered quite well, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any further debate or discussion or questions on the motion? If not, call the question. All in favour? Against? I take it it's unanimous, although I didn't see all hands going up. That's a large step in the right direction. [interjection] I beg your pardon.

9:22

MR. MAGNUS: Just a question for clarification now that that's gone through. How on earth are we going to ensure that this goes to Members' Services or wherever it has to go, Frank, prior to getting in this same situation next year?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't think we as a Public Accounts Committee have the ability to tell, through the budgeting process, any elected member that they can't claim that honorarium, a right that's legislated. My understanding of the legal process is that the remuneration legislation would have to be amended, which would affect all committees or be specific to this committee. Is that correct, Frank?

MR. WORK: That's correct. Under the Legislative Assembly Act, the Members' Services Committee is delegated the responsibility of setting allowances and entitlements for members. Again, I'm being sort of bold here, but I would suggest that if you want changes made there, perhaps rather than having this committee try to tell the Members' Services Committee what to do, there certainly are representatives of both sides on the Members' Services Committee and the way to address the issue may be through your representatives on that committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'd now like to move on.

MRS. BURGNER: I have a question on that point. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I notice at the end of the agenda items is an item called Committee Report. It would appear to me that if we are going to fundamentally change some of the past practices of this committee – and in light of Dr. Taylor's remarks we are doing that, because many of us have been elected to set an example in a fiscal restraint mode – it should be appropriate for

this committee to prepare, perhaps as an addendum or preamble to the committee report, some of the changes and recommendations which we feel would better assist Albertans in the managing of our dollars.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would rule at this time that there is an appropriate place on the agenda to deal with that.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman, but I want to clarify how we notify Members' Services of a change that we would like them to consider. My comment on that one is that I don't believe it's appropriate for us to casually speak to our Members' Services colleagues and pass information. "Hey, did you hear what we did in Public Accounts, guys? Could you think about it?"

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to rule that there are many places on this agenda - it could be under Committee Report; it could be under other business - where you could certainly give notice of a motion or bring forward a motion at that time.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman, but what I'm trying to establish here is that a motion has been brought forward and approved by this committee. Now we are trying to clarify: where does that motion sit so that it has some active element to it? What I would like to hear is not, as our legal counsel has suggested, that that's going to be a casual discussion from both sides of the House to our colleagues.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. I have to rule that I would want this discussion to happen at a later time. The spirit of the motion, because of the legislative ability of this committee or lack of it, was that there was an agreement amongst the members sitting here not to claim it. That's what we're dealing with at this time, and that motion was carried unanimously. With great respect, I would ask you please to raise the matter you're discussing at this time under other business, or indeed I'd accept it under Committee Report. I'd like to stay to the agenda that we approved and move on to the next item of business, which is Out-of-session Committee Meetings.

MRS. BURGNER: With all due respect, Madam Chairman, I am very frustrated. I have no mechanism to record or detail motions that are now going to come forward as we go through this particular document, and there is . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have to interrupt. You certainly have the ability to record. It will be in *Hansard*. It will be in the minutes of this meeting. Certainly as a responsible chairman, I will ensure that it will be dealt with if we get to that time today on the agenda. If it isn't, it certainly will be on the next agenda.

MRS. BURGNER: Perhaps, then, I've got a motion I'd like to suggest on another item. I would hold that to Notices of Motions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to rule that we're following an approved agenda. We've dealt with (c)(i). I'd now like to move on to (c)(ii), which deals with out-of-session committee meetings. I will certainly recognize you at the appropriate time on the agenda.

MRS. BURGNER: Is that in Notices of Motions? I just want to know where you speak to motions. Is it going to come under . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have acknowledged already, if with due respect you would please hear what I'm saying, that there are two parts on this agenda where I would allow you to speak: under Committee Report or indeed under Other Business, which is probably the most appropriate part.

I'd now like to move to (c)(ii), Out-of-session Committee Meetings. Frank Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Madam Chairman, I'd like to put a motion on the agenda. My motion is that the committee meet outside the legislative session, meetings to be called by the chairperson as required.

Speaking to my motion, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee for a number of years it has been my experience in the past that we have not had the opportunity each year to meet with all the ministers and their departments. We know we are in difficulty financially in this province. If we can give some guidance from this committee to the Treasurer and the department of the Treasurer, I think that would be facilitative in balancing our budget. Since we've all agreed now to waive collections of honoraria, there would be no additional costs to the Legislative Assembly or the government to have this committee meet. So I would move, repeating the motion, that we meet as necessary outside the legislative session as well as during the legislative session so we may meet with all the ministers.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I really can't agree to this. I think for one thing it's okay for the hon. member to sit there and say there are no additional costs. I'm not sure where he's from. He's from Calgary. I'm 600 kilometres away, and there are additional costs for me to come here in terms of travel expenses. I think we need to do our business efficiently budgetwise, but we need to do our business efficiently timewise. I don't believe we need extra meetings. We can do our business efficiently in the time we have already scheduled.

I certainly cannot vote for that motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, really have difficulty with this motion. To say there's no extra cost, I don't know where the hon. member is coming from. The time element as well. One of the things we are very anxious to do is get out from under the dome, and here we are being requested to come back under the dome again. In my particular case, it's a five-hour round-trip drive, which is dead time. I'm sorry, folks, but last year I spent between 500 and 600 hours driving. Now, to turn around and want me to come and spend a bunch more time going over what happened two years ago . . . I certainly agree with the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat when he says it is important that we use our time here efficiently. Certainly as we get into the budgets for the current year, that's where the real effort should be focused. We've set up some subcommittees to assist us in doing that, and I'm very anxious that we get on with those and make the real change.

I simply will not be supporting this motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I speak against the motion as well, because definitely the cost of traveling has to be accounted for. The amount of time we take to travel also has to be taken into account, because we are paid to serve the people of

our constituencies. The amount of time we take to travel takes away from the time we spend to serve them, and that's money as well.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: I would speak in favour of the motion. I think part of the responsibility of this committee is to assess how funds approved by this Legislature have been spent in the past and to learn lessons from that and apply it to the current budget process. I would think that many of the issues that arise arise over the course of the year, so it would be appropriate for the committee to meet as required out of session.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Anyone wishing to speak further to the motion? Mr. Coutts.

9:32

MR. COUTTS: A point of clarification for us that are new here on Public Accounts: just how many times a year has this committee met in the past, and do you envision that same type of process happening in the future?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: As chairman, the committee has met during session on a Wednesday morning historically. That was my understanding. When I've gone over the minutes of the previous meetings, there was an indication to me that, yes, it was every Wednesday, same hour, as long as the session. So depending on how many weeks the session is, that's how often we would meet, irrespective of what the workload scrutinizing public accounts was. Supplementary?

MR. COUTTS: That being the case, I agree with my former colleagues. Out of session I would have to drive back here, again 600 kilometres, and that would be expensive. I really feel that if we do get our ducks in a row and make the point that we are going to come here every Wednesday and get the job done, then we shouldn't need these out-of-session committee meetings. Therefore, I will be voting against the motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'll acknowledge Calgary-East and then Rocky Mountain House. Then I'd ask for the mover to speak to the motion.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just some clarification on the out-of-session meeting. Did the committee meet before on an out-of-session basis, and how often do we meet if we decide to meet in the future?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: As chairman, it would behoove us to look at what the function or the mandate of this committee is going to be. If it's going to be as it historically has been, probably the less meetings you have the more effective you will be. If we're going to seriously look at the recommendations of the Auditor General – and hopefully you've all taken the time to read the Canadian council public accounts recommendations, which would make it accountable back to the Legislature, to Albertans – then we would obviously need more time to do an effective job and ensure that fiscal responsibility was in place.

MR. AMERY: Madam Chairman, more time would cost us more money for traveling to Edmonton from Calgary and from Medicine Hat and from all over the province.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: From past experience, if one is good at calendaring, you try not to come to any given location just to do one function. But certainly there is an acknowledgment that if you do go out of session, unless you can actually schedule so that you're doing more than one function, yes, it would be an increased cost, there's no doubt.

Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thought that all members were aware that in fact under the new Standing Orders we will be going into session twice a year. Dr. Percy's comment about issues coming up during the year – well, we are going to have more opportunity in the future when we are here. We will be meeting in the fall and spring. I suppose there is a slight danger that there could be a time lag, but certainly not something that would be critical.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: As chairman, unless I'm challenged, I would like to rule that we'll have three more speakers and then the mover will close debate.

Mr. Chadi, Mr. Dalla-Longa, and Mr. McFarland.

MR. CHADI: Madam Chairman, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-East asked the question, as I understood it anyway: how often did the past committee meet out of session? How often did you meet, how many times?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Zero.

MR. CHADI: Okay. The next question would be, if I may: is it not possible, if something was rather urgent and we had to set meetings out of session, because we're stationed here in Edmonton and many of our members in this committee are, particularly, from southern Alberta, that we could hold something in Calgary or something like that or something closer so that we can all sort of somehow find a middle ground for everyone so that it wouldn't be so one-sided?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: There are some restrictions. Inasmuch as this body certainly has the ability to move motions allowing them to meet out of session, within the legislative, parliamentary tradition, you would lose the ability of *Hansard* to record if you did not meet within the Legislature, which then would become an additional cost to this committee. In other words, you could have *Hansard* in Calgary, but you would have to pay for that. So there would be an added cost.

MR. CHADI: So it is possible that we could do it. I mean, it's obvious that we do have \$18,000 worth of a budget.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to be strict. Unless the chair is challenged, I'd like to move to Mr. Dalla-Longa and then Mr. McFarland and then to the mover closing debate.

MR. LUND: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'll entertain the point of order.

MR. LUND: There are a number of us that have points to raise, and I really take exception to your closing debate arbitrarily. I'm sorry, but I'm really concerned about the most recent comments that were made, and I see other members that have concerns and questions. So I beg you to reconsider your ruling.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not going to change my ruling. I think that when we look at the agenda – and if you wish to challenge the chair, certainly do so. As chairman I would point out that if we are going to be fiscally responsible, accountable back to the Legislature – we are dealing with an organizational meeting this morning. We've got to 3(c)(ii), and we have the Auditor General present, whom we have not been able to invite to make his presentation. I think my ruling is certainly in the spirit of parliamentary tradition. Everyone's had equal opportunity to speak, and it would be appropriate to close debate, but certainly if the majority challenge the chair, obviously I'll have to . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: Just a question on that point. I'm just wondering in regards to the Auditor General. You say he's here this morning to present his report. How often does he attend these meetings? Does he come every second time, every fourth time? I haven't been here before.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would be prepared to speak to that when it's the appropriate time. The chair on a point of order has been challenged, and anyone who wishes to speak to that: specifically, why I should allow more speakers to this motion.

MR. STELMACH: Madam Chairman, being a new member on the committee, I'd just like you to give me some background from where you cite your powers to bring closure to debate on any motion. Is it anywhere recorded that gives you the authority to say, "Well, I'm just going to arbitrarily do it?"

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Standing Order 62(3):

The Chairman shall maintain order in the committees of the whole Assembly, deciding all questions of order subject to an appeal to the Assembly.

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order. *Beauchesne*, sixth edition: if the chair is being challenged, it's my understanding that the chair has to vacate the chair.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I will take guidance from Parliamentary Counsel.

DR. L. TAYLOR: The citations are *Beauchesne* 821 and 822. In the event of an appeal, the chairman shall immediately leave the chair and the deputy chairman or another member shall take the chair and put the question to the committee as to whether the chairman's ruling shall be supported. If the ruling is supported, the business of the committee shall proceed in accordance with the chairman's ruling. If not, the ruling shall be disregarded. The chairman shall resume the chair immediately following disposition by the committee of the appeal.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, Dr. Taylor, I thought I was dealing with a point of order, not an appeal. If you want to turn the point of order into an appeal, yes, we have to deal with it. I find it, quite frankly, as chairman very disappointing that this new Public Accounts Committee is following the tradition of this past committee and getting into procedural difficulties and challenging the chair, when all we're trying to do is follow an agenda in an orderly, parliamentary format.

A point of order has been made. Is there a majority wishing to support the point of order in challenging the chair's ruling? All in favour? Against? It has been carried. So I will continue to acknowledge who wishes to speak to this motion.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I guess we're speaking now about moving that the committee meet year-round. Maybe, Madam Chairman, we could structure something where we allow ourselves the option at the completion of this session to see if we've had opportunity to complete our business and maybe make a decision at that point in time to see if we need to meet some more. With that we'd be encouraged to try to move along quickly to try to achieve our business, rather than right now deciding that we're going to meet all year round. Quite frankly, I'm not sure I understand this committee; I'm not sure I know where it's going. Maybe I didn't read the material; I've got so much other stuff to read. I think, after hearing the discussions, I would be in favour of something where we allowed ourselves the option to meet year-round.

9:42

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess the point I wanted to speak to had to do with the optional meetings with respect to fiscal responsibility and your comments a few minutes earlier about how we would conduct ourselves with some measure of fiscal restraint. I have some concern about setting in practice a process which automatically builds into it an additional expense, such as the additional cost of *Hansard* should we move out of the confines of this building.

My understanding – and maybe that's up for grabs – is that this committee has been structured in such a way with certain tasks and responsibilities. We are all struggling with the fact that this is our first meeting, but without any orientation whatsoever we're trying to establish the ground rules when what we really want to do on this agenda is do some magnitude of business. My concern is that we don't have common process, even though we do have in many respects common intent, and that is to do the public scrutiny that's required to the best of our abilities and in a timely and fiscally responsible fashion.

So in concluding my comments I will suggest that an out-of-session committee meeting is inappropriate in light of having just moved not to take our honorariums and comments about restraining from taking expenditures that otherwise are allocated to us, but, secondly, as a supplementary comment, that prior to our next meeting the chair organize an appropriate orientation scheduled at the next meeting time so that we can get through this, come to a common intent, and move on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Vegreville-Viking.

MR. STELMACH: Madam Chairperson, the motion as I heard it was that we have out-of-session meetings. That was put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. It simply says that we have out-of-session meetings, period. It gives no dates, doesn't give the number of meetings, doesn't give this committee indication of who's going to call those meetings, under what authority, for what reason. So I'm sorry, I can't support the motion as it's worded.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Yes. I will oppose it. I would like to talk regarding that motion. Number one, we are working with a budget here, and on this budget there is no item covering the cost of traveling and the cost of scheduling meetings outside of the session. When we do anything, I think there is reason for it. The reason that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts meets during session only

is because all of the important decisions that we make collectively as a House have to be done when we are in session. That's why this committee is sitting during session. Now, when we move our meeting out of session, that means we have to pay for all the additional expense, and we're not budgeted for it. I don't know if the hon. member is willing to pay for it out of his own pocket or not; that's another question. We don't have a budget for it, period. So why are we even talking about it now? If we went for it, we should bring it back to the House and ask for extra money, ask for a budget.

Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Anyone wishing further to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. With a lot of respect, Madam Chairman, I cannot support this motion. The points that I cannot support the motion on are a result of some of the comments that have been made in the past that we have to deal with urgent matters. Again I mean this with a lot of sincerity. How can there be an urgent matter from a report in 1991-92 that can't be dealt with during session, meeting with the departments, talking with the Auditor General? From my information we the government have implemented almost all the recommendations made by the Auditor General, who, by the way, makes a good pile of money to do a very good job of scrutinizing the books.

I'm not concerned about money out of pocket. I haven't collected and I didn't ever expect to collect money for something while I was sitting here in Public Accounts. The thing that's most crucial to me is efficient use of time. I, like many of the people here, if I'm really speeding, am four and a half hours away. I've got 30 communities. I've scheduled my time already up until March '94, and I'm sorry, but I'm not prepared to have to go back to people who don't get to see me who want to see me while I'm in session. Thirty communities all feel just as important as the city of Calgary council or the city of Edmonton council, even though they're little, tiny specks on the map. They're every bit as important as anyone in any of the biggest communities here in this province. I'm sorry – and I mean it sincerely – I just don't have and can't afford to spend more time traveling to come up here to spend more time sitting in a meeting when I've got people at home with concerns. My auditors are at the end of my telephone in my office right here, and they're my auditors back home.

MS CARLSON: I respect the discussion that we've had on this point so far this morning, but I would like to remind all the members that if there's an emergency item or an item in the budget that really requires some in-depth discussion, we need to have the option to be called back at the discretion of the chairman. So I'm speaking in support of the motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, just a question. I thought we were looking at 1991-92, and the previous member said we could be called back to examine an item in the budget. I'm just a little confused as to exactly what we're doing. I thought it was past years, not the present budget. So her comment that we should be called back to examine an emergency item in the budget: could you clarify that for me?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could we keep our debate to the motion, and possibly once the motion has been dealt with, I'd ask the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to qualify what she was saying, please.

Anyone else wishing to speak to the motion? Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I do apologize. As everybody in the House knows I'm sure by now – I've been asked by darn near everybody what I wear in my ear – I have a little hearing problem.

May I ask a question? When the Member for Edmonton-Roper asked the question about whether or not this committee had ever met out of session, what was the answer?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No. It has never met out of session.

MR. MAGNUS: Well, with that in mind, I think it's all been said. Again, my schedule is fairly busy as well. We've never met out of session before. We're talking about history, something that's already happened. I see absolutely no requirement or need to come in here at the call of the chair, which is an interesting proposal, but, at the same time, the call of the chair is going to disrupt everyone's schedule. As the Member for Little Bow said, we spend a lot of time up here, and I'd like to be in my constituency occasionally and not have meetings called willy-nilly to come and up discuss something that's already happened; i.e., past expenses.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The hon. member.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's just a question of clarification before I vote on this motion. Do you continue to meet with the staff out of session on our behalf? Do you continue to do that as the chairman of the committee?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The only contact I will have with staff is in ensuring that the appropriate information and the agendas are developed to go out to the members of this committee. On an informal basis I will have an ongoing communication and hopefully meetings with the vice-chairman of this committee.

9:52

MRS. FRITZ: So you meet on an informal basis, but then you communicate directly with us as members of this committee while we're out of session?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No. I was wanting to address the orientation once we've concluded the debate on this motion.

Is there anyone wishing to speak further on the motion? The Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. I've been sitting here since Dr. Percy made his comments, trying to think of an instance that would arise out of an account that is two years old that would be emergent, that we would have to deal with. If he could think of one, I would really appreciate him telling me, and it may change my mind on how I vote.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The chair will allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to reply to that question.

DR. PERCY: Certainly. I was hoping that the mandate of this committee would be sufficiently flexible that if issues emerged with regards to the budget – because our role is legislative scrutiny; it is the Public Accounts. Also there are budgetary items that flow today from decisions that have been made two years ago. Part of the way of getting a handle on that is trying to figure out what happened two years ago: why did it happen, and why are we in . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think the chair is going to have to interrupt and say that we're going to have to bring this first Standing Committee on Public Accounts to a conclusion and hold the motion over.

Before I do adjourn, on the question of orientation, it was my understanding that it was the responsibility of caucuses to ensure that their members had the appropriate information. If indeed that hasn't happened, as chairman I would certainly set some of my own personal time aside and lead any member of the Legislature through the past minutes, the past *Hansards*, the past Auditor General's reports, the past Canadian council recommendations so that everyone in this Chamber understands the function and the role of the Public Accounts Committee. I will make that commitment. If indeed no one accepts my commitment, I will assume that the party caucuses have fulfilled their functions and that every individual member of this Public Accounts Committee comes here fully informed and to do the business that's before us in a responsible fashion.

With that, I stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:56 a.m.]