

8:30 a.m.

Wednesday, May 10, 1995

[Chairman: Mrs. Abdurahman]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call us to order. Before I have approval of the agenda, I would ask all members to assist *Hansard* this morning, because it's the young lady's first covering of Public Accounts. State your name so she can clearly get it on the record, and that will really assist *Hansard*.

With that comment, I'd like approval of the agenda, please. Peter. All in favour, say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any opposed? It's carried unanimously.

Approval of the minutes of the May 3, 1995, committee meeting as circulated. Jocelyn. All in favour, say aye. Any nays? Carried unanimously.

It's indeed a pleasure to welcome the Hon. Halvar Jonson, Minister of Education, and staff this morning to deal with Education. Also, once again, a warm welcome to our Auditor General and Mike Morgan from the Auditor General's department. I'd ask the hon. minister if he'd like to have opening comments and introduce his staff at this time, please.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman and members of the committee. First of all, thank you for the invitation to introduce my staff. I have with me to assist me: on my left, Dr. Reno Bosetti, deputy minister; on my right, Gary Baron, director of finance; on my second left, Jeff Olson, assistant director of finance; and then the gentleman who is going to handle all the really tough questions dealing with difficult accounting matters, Dave Antoniuk, who is the assistant director of finance with the Learning Resources Distribution Centre, and it has under it the revolving fund. Those are the people here assisting me this morning.

I'd like to begin by saying that I'm pleased to be here. If I could just make a personal comment, I spent many, many years on the Public Accounts Committee. Now I'm on the other side of the House, and that has been a new experience for me.

I'd like to make some brief comments and then go forward to questions from members of the committee. I'd like to also indicate that if in our deliberations this morning some questions come up that we are not able to provide detailed answers to, we'll certainly follow up with written responses.

Ladies and gentlemen, when we look at the public accounts for the Department of Education for 1993-94, we see the first steps in the government's overall restructuring of the administration and delivery of education in Alberta. It was in this year that the first three-year business plan for education, entitled *Meeting the Challenge*, was released. This plan set the long-term goals for the education system, to find the strategies for those goals and outline the results against which achievement would be measured. In essence, the three-year plan provided an outline of the mechanisms for change, the schedule, and the expected outcomes of the education restructuring process. That plan reflected the extensive discussion and broad consultations with Albertans about concerns and priorities for education in years to come.

Over the two-year period leading up to the release of the education business plan in February of 1993, more Albertans participated in education consultations and the process of change than in any other period of our history as an education system in the province. Indeed, well over 20,000 Albertans participated in our consultations on education. This involvement by Albertans in

the education roundtables and numerous other consultation processes has shaped the changes to the environment in which our children learn and grow and will enrich the education our students receive. Input from Albertans was the primary factor that formulated the five principles which serve as the framework for the education restructuring. Very briefly, those principles are: students must come first; schools and school systems must be accountable to parents and taxpayers; more authority must be provided to schools and parents; administrative costs must be reduced; and a fair system of funding school boards must be implemented. We know these principles will ensure that the restructuring of education ultimately leads to an enhanced education system that deals with the changing needs of Alberta students. These principles, as I've just outlined, will focus resources on student instruction, provide more opportunity for meaningful involvement of parents in community education decisions, and provide more education decision-making closest to where it should be provided, and that is the students.

In addition to the establishment of new directions for education through the development and release of the three-year plan for the education system, the 1993-94 fiscal year also saw the administration of the first Canada-wide mathematics test to 13- and 16-year-old students across the country. I'm pleased to say that Alberta, working with Quebec and Ontario, took the lead in the establishment of this program as part of the national school indicators program. It is our view that our new education system must be more focused on results and accountability, and the national SAIP results in mathematics and future tests in reading and writing and science will give us a better indication of how well Alberta students are achieving national standards.

In another area of interprovincial co-operation, our province joined British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon Territory, and the Northwest Territories to establish a protocol to increase co-operation and resource sharing in basic education. The protocol will lead to improvements in the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of elementary and secondary education services in western Canada. Also, as part of the western Canada protocol, work began with other western provinces and territories to develop a common curriculum in mathematics from kindergarten to grade 12. At the same time, a provincial mathematics initiative was launched in Alberta to help improve the teaching and learning of mathematics. Networks were established so that teachers could share ideas and instructional processes and obtain the support and advice of other professionals.

Looking at the complete needs of the child and not just educational needs was the driving force behind the launch of the co-ordination of services for children initiative during the 1994 year. The goal of this initiative was to provide Alberta children with more integrated and efficient education, health, social services, and other services at the community level. Alberta Education worked with other government departments to establish six pilot projects across the province. As well, as with all our education initiatives, the long-term objective is to better meet the needs of Alberta students.

Madam Chairman, as you can see from the public accounts for 1993-94, Alberta Education distributed provincial grants totaling approximately \$1.85 billion for student instruction, student transportation, and school capital. Ensuring that the education requirements of special-needs students were met and continue to be a high priority, \$117.9 million of that \$1.85 billion was allocated to special education grants for students in grades 1 through 12 and almost \$23 million for ECS special education programs. To help even out the inequities in funding available to school boards and to ensure that all Alberta students have equal

opportunity to access a quality education program, over \$83 million was provided in equity grants. This includes a onetime allocation of \$30 million from provincial lottery revenues to less wealthy school boards.

In summary, 1993-94 was a year of challenge and change for education in Alberta and, I think, a year of very positive change. It was a year of achievements that have helped us to respond to the changing expectations of society and the emerging needs of students. It was a year that established the direction for and saw the first steps towards a new education system in Alberta, a system that will ensure that all students have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need in today's society.

Madam, Chairman, those are my remarks, and we're open to questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, hon. minister.
Peter Sekulic.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good morning. Mr. Minister, my first question pertains to program reference 2.4.1 in volume 2 of the 1993-94 public accounts. It pertains to private school assistance. I note there that the amount overexpended in terms of grants to private schools was \$303,000. I'm curious to know whether that reflects an increase in the number of private schools operating in Alberta or an increase in grants to the existing schools.

MR. JONSON: First of all, with respect to private schools, there was an increase in enrollment. As I think you certainly understand, private schools are, as with public and separate schools, funded on per pupil grants to a large degree. Just looking here, the increase in enrollment was about 4.9 percent. The other area which was very significant and is in this category: in terms of a percentage increase, there was a 1,400 percent change in home education because the home education provisions and the funding were coming in at that time.

8:40

I was looking for information here in terms of what new schools opened that year. We would have to get that for you. I think maybe one new one opened. We will check on that for you. I can't answer the question as to whether there were any new schools and where they were, but I can answer that, yes, in terms of increased enrollment, that was a major factor.

MR. SEKULIC: How many private schools currently operate in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: About 120, as I recall.

MR. SEKULIC: My final question is with regard to the whole issue of performance and outcome. What measures or what standards do you have that these schools must comply with? What criteria are in place, or do you have criteria in place for them to meet? And how often do you monitor?

MR. JONSON: First of all, private schools are accredited. Accredited private schools are required to take our achievement tests and report results. If they are offering high school courses, they are required to have diploma examinations. In addition, the department, through the field services component, inspects, if you will, or visits accredited private schools on a regular basis. I could ask Reno to comment on how frequently that is. But there is an

inspection or a monitoring function provided by the department with respect to private schools.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.
Gary Friedel.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. My first question comes out of the Auditor General's report, page 49. It's in reference to recommendation 13. The Auditor General's report refers to the linking of school board costs with results. I'm wondering: have there been any changes in the presentation or the form, I guess, of the financial reporting so that the results can be measured in any future reports? Or are there any guidelines available to link these costs with results?

MR. JONSON: The answer is yes, we certainly have. First of all, we've developed a revised budget report form and guidelines, and they are built around providing, in our view, much clearer and more precise information on the costs of the particular services the schools provide. Further to that, we're looking at the whole auditing process with respect to school boards, and we have developed and provided to school boards a guide for developing business plans which provide assistance to school boards in linking their expenditures to their performance and their programs. A whole effort is under way here to get a more precise and more uniform system of reporting to us from school boards across the province. So that is certainly under way.

The other thing I'd just like to mention is that in order to provide this guidance with respect to business plans and direction with respect to the financial reports, we have sent this material out to school boards after consulting with superintendents and SBOA, the School Business Officials of Alberta. What I'm getting around to saying – and I'm sorry to ramble a bit – is that the final format for our business plans and the accountability measures that will be required is subject to our accountability framework implementation team review, which we'll be dealing with in government in the next two or three weeks. School boards are able to work on their interim plans for this year, but these recommendations from this committee, as they are approved, will set specifics down the road for what has to be reported on.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary, Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. The whole purpose of being able to measure obviously leads to being able to compare. How do you see that one school board's costs and results could be compared against another? I realize you can compare costs, but is there something in this system that would be able to compare results between one jurisdiction and another?

MR. JONSON: Yes, there will be, and I think it will be much more meaningful now that we've gone to full provincial funding as established through the funding framework. School boards across the province are being funded on the same formula basis. They're being funded, if you would, equitably. Special cost factors such as sparsity and distance are taken into consideration in the formula, so you're going to have roughly the same basis of funding for all school boards in the province and considerable comparability in the expenditure per student. Therefore from that, when you look at the results that will be provided through I think we can say with certainty the continuation and expansion of the achievement test program, the diploma examinations, the retention rate of students in schools, measures such as that, we will have, I think, meaningful comparisons we could make among school boards if we wished to do so.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary, Gary.

MR. JONSON: Could I just make one other comment, Madam Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, certainly.

MR. JONSON: That is that I think this will be very helpful. The one caution we and I think everybody, including the public of the province as they review these results, have to keep in mind is that in some jurisdictions there are some unique circumstances on either a short-term or a long-term basis that can cause a marked difference in performance. But overall there's a good basis for comparison in this plan.

THE CHAIRMAN: Final supplementary, Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. Would it be possible for the department to identify the total costs of producing, say, a grade 12 student and then go on to compare in part, as you just answered, between school boards but even more importantly between other provinces?

MR. JONSON: Yes. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: That's it, hon. minister?

MR. JONSON: I'm sorry. Would you like me to elaborate? I could elaborate on it. Yes, it would be possible if we could gather the historical data right now. But it will be much better in the future when we have the uniform budget report forms, the accountability measures in place, and when we will be able to track through our improved information gathering system student costs and what the grant rates and all the rest of it was through the 12 or 13 years a student would be in school. Similar improvements in collecting data and so forth are coming into place in other provinces. So, yes, it will be able to be done in the future.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair loves succinct answers, hon. minister. Thank you.
Mike Percy.

DR. PERCY: Thank you. Mr. Minister, my questions relate to one of the more contentious issues in educational restructuring, and that is ECS. It would come under vote 2.3.1. My first question. Certainly when an educational system is shifting its focus to highlighting outcomes and allocating resources to achieve certain levels of outcomes – when the reduction in ECS, the funded hours, was undertaken, were there studies undertaken by the province looking at ECS funds and their allocation to justify that decision? Were there any expenditures in Alberta-based research? Were they behind the decision?

8:50

MR. JONSON: There were no studies done at that time for that particular purpose. I did look at studies and the research in Alberta relative to ECS, going back a number of years to periods in Alberta's history when the Edmonton public school board, I think it was, established the ECS program and then later discontinued it, but that's just history. I'm just saying that I looked at the information that was available, but there was not a new specific study conducted.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Minister, since there's now such a wide variety of programs out there – some that are 400 hours, some that are

200-plus, and some where there are children who are not taking any ECS – would it not now be the time to put in place a study to look at outcomes, whether there is in fact a performance difference on the basis of numbers of hours of ECS? The data are there now to do the tracking and look at outcomes.

MRS. BURGNER: Madam Chairman, that's out of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would suggest to members that there have been precedents. When the Premier was here with other members responsible, we got into policy. I didn't hear any objections at that point in time, and as chairman I made it clear that if government members or Official Opposition members get into policy and there are no objections, that will be the way the chair rules for the rest of this session. So I don't accept that it's out of order.

MR. JONSON: Two parts to my answer. First of all . . .

MS CALAHASEN: Don't answer. It's a policy question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, I believe that rules from the chair have to be consistent. Based on a previous Public Accounts meeting, specifically when the Premier was here, government members extensively got into policy and the chair allowed it. I would ask that the question that's been asked please be addressed.

MS CALAHASEN: Madam Chairman, I'd like to say something else.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you on a point of order?

MS CALAHASEN: Yes, I am. It's a point of order. As a matter of fact, two weeks ago – I think it was exactly two weeks ago – I was also called out of order on a policy question. So I think it's prudent on the chairman's behalf to ensure that policy questions don't get answered.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, member, I will reiterate once again. When we had the Premier here there was an attempt at filibustering. There were direct policy questions. The people on the government side who were answering questions were specifically into policy. Where there is a majority of government members and there is no challenge to that, as chair I have to be fair in continuing with the rules for this session. If the Public Accounts Committee wants to change the rules, then the next session of this Legislature is the appropriate time.

MR. PHAM: Madam Chairman, with all due respect, I think from time to time we do stray into the area of policy. However, in this case it is so clear that this question not only deals with policy but also suggests a solution for a current policy the government has. We do have question period every day, and I suggest this kind of question would be a lot more suitable for that kind of occasion than asking in this forum. We only have one Public Accounts Committee every week, and we have question period every day. I'm sure the hon. minister will be more than happy to take your question during question period today. I guarantee he will do that if you raise the question.

DR. PERCY: I guess there are three points on that, Madam Chairman. First, it is question period, not answer period, and this is a more relaxed forum where, on a reasonable basis, you can discuss the issues. The second is that I clearly put my question in the context of what had been done in the year '93-94 in terms of

vote 2.3.1., and the issue was one of ongoing research. Now, it is true that some of the hon. members behind me are extraordinarily defensive on the issue of ECS, and I can understand that. It's only natural in light of the public reaction to these decisions having been made on the basis of no research. So it was a natural follow-through, saying in light of the Auditor General's statement on outcomes – in fact, the hon. Member for Peace River focused on outcomes and expenditures. It was really just: is there a framework in place now to ensure an ongoing review of these types of issues, to link expenditures to outcomes? So I don't see it as being an entirely current policy issue. I see it as being a question that relates to the structure that is in place in the Department of Education and now, in light of the restructuring the hon. minister spoke of in his opening statements, whether or not there is a review in place, because as it was stated, it wasn't there before.

THE CHAIRMAN: The fight flag has been waved, so as chair I would . . . [interjections] I'd like to bring some order and decorum back.

Mr. Pham.

MR. PHAM: Yeah. The hon. member just raised the issue of having some mechanism in place to measure outcome and input. However, the purpose in us being here is to look at the past expenditure, not the current expenditure of government. I really find that his question is totally irrelevant to what we are doing. When he complained that question period is not an answer period, I take great exception to that. I find that question period is really . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Can we have some order, please? The chair has ruled on the basis of the debate. I still rule that the question is in order and that we proceed.

Hon. minister.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Madam Chairman. What I wish to indicate is to refer members of the committee back to a previous answer I gave, and that is that as one of our major initiatives, we are moving to put in place an accountability framework which deals with performance measures and the performance of the overall system from ECS to grade 12. So we are addressing ECS in the context of the overall education system in that way.

DR. PERCY: In terms, then, of the expenditures undertaken in '93-94 and in light of the Auditor General's statements with regard to linking expenditures to outcomes, what is the nature of the performance measures you would have been studying in this period with regard to assessing, for example, the payoff to ECS?

MR. JONSON: Well, as I indicated to you, Madam Chairman, and to the committee, the development of our whole accountability framework policy is in its latter stages but has not been completed, so that is not a question I should try to answer at this point in time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.
Jocelyn Burgener.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to refer to the Auditor General's report in general. I want to review some information and ask a specific question. In the recommendations with respect to accountability – and they were alluded to a little earlier – there are a number of comments about the need to have the reporting of school boards more front and

centre and some consistency in the reporting, et cetera. I want to know if the department would have the same level of reporting requested of them. Or is that something that was not considered in this public accounts review?

MR. JONSON: First of all . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me a second, hon. minister.

MRS. BURGNER: I thought it was posed to the Auditor General, minister.

MR. VALENTINE: I wasn't sure about that. The comments under recommendation 12 were directed towards the schools. In paragraph 3 there is a comment with respect to the promotion of "consistency and comparability" amongst school boards. Without appropriate information from the individual boards in the format and in detail appropriate for comparability on a consistent basis, that measure can't be accomplished.

9:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to address the question as well?

MRS. BURGNER: I was going to give my next supplemental question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I certainly can allow that, if you wish to have your two full supplementals.

MR. JONSON: I would just naturally support what the Auditor General is saying; that is, as I previously indicated, the Department of Education is following up, I think, in a major way on the Auditor General's recommendations in this regard. A considerable effort is going into the revised budget report forms, the providing of consistent information and, along with that, putting in place our performance measures so that we can endeavour to report on what is being expected here. In the hon. member's question, Madam Chairman, I think there was a reference directed to the department itself. Certainly I expect that arising out of the accountability committee's report, chaired by the Member for Red Deer-South, they will be commenting on that, and certainly as a Department of Education, for those functions we perform, whether it is curriculum development or financial advice to school boards, we are quite prepared to ask for people's views of our performance in that regard and re-evaluate, if you want to put it that way, on the basis of the functions we have.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.
Supplementary, Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: That suffices for my questions. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Terry.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Minister. I was looking at some of the costs associated with the regional services under 3.2.1 and ending at 3.2.9. Those, as I see it, are simply administrative costs. I'd like to wrap into it as well your capital investment costs in some of the regional services. I wonder if you might provide a brief explanation of some of those overexpenditures. When I say that, I see Grande Prairie as one and Calgary and Lethbridge as others. Likewise, there are several in the capital investment votes, 3.2 down to 3.2.9.

MR. JONSON: Madam Chairman, if I understand it correctly, there are two parts to the question. There was a question about overexpenditure in terms of regional services, and first of all, I would comment on the regional offices. As members may know, we are phasing and have phased out our regional offices. We've pretty well completed that task outside Edmonton and Calgary. Now, in accomplishing that, there were certain severance payments that had to be made to bring about the staff reduction. Consequently, in the particular year to make the transition, you had these additional expenditures. As I recall, the severance payments were the primary driver there for that overexpenditure.

The other item here, because I think the hon. member referred to capital expenditure as well in this category – prior to the decision to phase out the regional offices in the areas of Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and Lethbridge, a decision had been made to upgrade the computer equipment of the regional offices. We were committed to an expenditure in that year for this new computer and information equipment, and '93-94 was a transition year in terms of putting in place the new plan for education. So we had that overexpenditure in computer equipment.

The final thing I'd like to say, Madam Chairman, is that while the offices have been closed down, the computers and related equipment have been moved to Edmonton and Calgary and are in use.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.
Supplementary, Terry.

MR. KIRKLAND: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for a very extensive answer. It reduces my supplemental to only one. When we look at severance packages as such, does the department follow a standard formula? When I ask that question, it would be, say, one week for each month of service or the likes of that.

MR. JONSON: Yes. I'll ask Dr. Bosetti to give you more detail.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Bosetti.

DR. BOSETTI: Thank you. There are several programs that have been in place. I don't recall which one was in place in '92 or '93 or whichever you were working with, but we have standard programs across government for abolishment of positions and for voluntary separation. There are a whole number of them. In every case the separations are related to the amount of time previously served with government. The maximum severance we've gone to, I believe, is 43 weeks' severance, and that would be accumulated for 13 years of service or more. So it's all on a formula that applies to everyone equally, if you like.

MR. KIRKLAND: Would it be safe to assume that some of those employees from the regional offices were moved into the Edmonton or Calgary offices?

DR. BOSETTI: Some did. The first thing we did with respect to closing down regional offices was to find where they could be repositioned. Many chose the separation option. In some cases – very few, as a matter of fact – some were not relocatable. There were one or two that were not relocatable. But all of them were either accommodated internally or have severed relationships and are working as consultants or in other fields.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dr. Bosetti. Thank you, Terry.
Hung Pham.

MR. PHAM: Let me begin by focusing your attention on public accounts, volume 2, page 68, item 3.1.3, curriculum services. In 1993-94 we spent almost \$6 million on curriculum services. One concern I have heard from my constituents is that the curriculum keeps changing. I look at the previous year's expenditure in this area as well, and every year we spend an average amount of somewhere from \$6 million or \$7 million on this particular item. Can the minister explain to us what is involved in this kind of thing, and why is it we have to spend so much in changing our curriculum every year?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Madam Chairman, I'd like to say that we have slowed down our rate of curriculum change in response to the type of view the hon. member has expressed as well as through the necessity of dealing with fiscal realities and the reduction in Education's budget. But I would like to comment because the hon. member refers to an historic matter in budgets. In the education community there was a point in time a few years ago, probably a decade or so, when the going theory in education as far as curriculum development was concerned was that you should be rotating a curriculum about every seven or eight years. That is, all curricula should be revised within an ongoing cycle so that at some stage pretty well every subject or program in the school is at one stage or the other – it is in place and being evaluated or it is being considered for revision – and then you go through the whole process again. That is not the case right now and certainly won't be during the three-year business plan we have in place now. We've said that we're slowing this down. We do have commitments in completing our overall career and technology studies program, a major revision in that area, to in a sense replace the old vocational education program. That's a major undertaking we have to complete.

I'll just mention one other area where we're working, and that was alluded to in my introductory remarks. That is that in the interests of what we think will be long-term efficiencies and also other advantages in a better program, we are working with other provinces to develop in mathematics, for instance, a common set of learning expectations across the four western provinces. We think that in that result there will be certain efficiencies and advantages, easier transferring of students between provinces but also economies of scale with respect to the purchase of materials from suppliers and that sort of thing.

9:10

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary, Hung.

MR. PHAM: Thank you. In the interests of getting the most for our money, have we ever done any audit or any comparison to ensure that the new curriculum we spent \$6 million on in 1993-94 was actually better than the one we were trying to replace?

MR. JONSON: I'll ask the department to comment further if they wish. In the sense of a detailed audit in the usual meaning of the term, I do not think so, but an audit in terms of – let's say we change the mathematics curriculum – looking at the results of students in light of the new curriculum as compared to previously: yes.

DR. BOSETTI: I'll just elaborate a little bit on that issue of curriculum. We've done a number of things in recent years to get away from that cyclical, every seven years renewal even though the rate of change about us in society probably demands that we do things quite deliberately to examine what we're teaching and how we're teaching it in light of the changes taking place, but that

passes by when we look at how we're dealing with curriculum today. We're dealing more with setting standards or expectations for learning outcomes. What used to be curriculum was: what textbook do you use? Right now we're focusing more on what outcomes we expect, and we're allowing a significant breadth in terms of the resources teachers use. However, we are still bound or pushed, if you like, to reviewing learning resources in order that teachers have a list of those that we think are good. So most of our focus today has been on setting standards and on designing the framework for curriculum as opposed to looking at learning resources and changing a textbook and changing a paragraph in it.

Just one other quick comment. One of the tests of whether curriculum is good or bad is: do students achieve what they're expected to achieve? The other is the fact in our case that across Canada, Alberta has taken a lead in curriculum design development. Alberta curriculum is used, for example, in the Maritimes extensively and across Canada. So the interprovincial work is going on now – we have a western protocol, and there is also a Maritimes one – in which provinces are working co-operatively to share their resources to build even better curriculum, again on the basis of standards as opposed to just the materials that are contained therein.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dr. Bosetti.

DR. BOSETTI: Madam Chairman, there is just one other thing I must say, because this is a question that I'm sure is burning in everybody's mind. Interprovincial curriculum development results in travel costs. I know members are often nervous about civil servants traveling. The only way we can really work co-operatively is by having our people travel, sometimes to Winnipeg and sometimes to Regina and sometimes to Vancouver, in order to work co-operatively in curriculum development. The task we're taking on is more of that than it was previously in having people resident in our department doing everything.

MR. PHAM: The answer of Dr. Bosetti leads me right to my last supplemental question. When you talked of other provinces actually making use of our curriculum in Alberta, I just want to compare, if you have the information with you, what other provinces were spending on curriculum services in the year 1993-94 and the year before that. Are they spending more or less money than we do? If they do make use of our curriculum, do we get any money back from them? I don't know about the other provinces, but if I have a choice whether I spend money to develop something or wait for somebody to develop and make use of that, I would try to pick the second choice anytime.

MR. JONSON: First of all, the answer to the second question is no, we do not charge people for using our curriculum. It's a kind of interesting fact, Madam Chairman, that in the realm of education – I suppose this is true of North America if not worldwide – the actual curriculum manuals are, generally speaking, not copyrighted. So it's a matter that's been open for a long time.

I can only answer the first question partly, Madam Chairman. That is that if we were to compare, let's say, the cost of the curriculum development section of the British Columbia Department of Education and ours, they're very comparable, very much the same. The same with Saskatchewan if you look at that relative to the much lower population to be served in Saskatchewan. But even then, whether you serve 500,000 students or 100,000, you still have to have the mathematics program. So once again, when you look at Saskatchewan's department, it's quite comparable too.

Beyond those two, I don't know the answer, though, with respect to the Maritimes and other provinces.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.
Nick Taylor.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good morning, gentlemen. My question is a general one, and it fits in with the "good morning, gentlemen." If you ran a census on the Department of Education, by far the vast majority, going all the way down to the schoolteacher level, would be women. Why is there not one woman amongst your assistants there, Mr. Minister? [interjections] No, wait a minute. That's right in under number one. Yeah?

MR. FRIEDEL: Point of order, Madam Chairman. [interjections]

MR. N. TAYLOR: Okay. Why was there not one last year then?

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you care to answer the question, hon. minister? [interjections]

MR. N. TAYLOR: There's a bunch of female Uncle Toms behind me here. Could I change it around? Why are they all men?

MR. FRIEDEL: Point of order. I don't believe, Madam Chairman, that these are the types of questions that . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: That's not true.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could I have some order, please? It's very difficult as chair to have order with people talking out of order and not being acknowledged by the chair. If you continue that, I will allow the question. You weren't allowing the member to connect it to the present public accounts. If he can't do that, then the chair will rule it out of order. But allow Nick Taylor, the Member for Redwater, the courtesy of being able to do that.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah. It's under vote 1, minister's office, deputy minister's office. There's an office under each vote obviously, and they're here to answer. I'm just asking: why are they all men, or why are there no women? I'll give you a choice of answering either of those questions.

MR. FRIEDEL: Madam Chairman, I challenge the chair's ruling on that, and I'd like to put it to a vote.

THE CHAIRMAN: You're challenging the chair if I allow this question?

MR. FRIEDEL: I'm challenging your ruling on the admissibility of that question, and I'd like to put it to a vote.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Certainly. All in favour of the chair being challenged for allowing the Member for Redwater to ask the question specific to why there are no female members, tying it to the deputy minister's office vote? All in favour of the chair being challenged?

MR. KIRKLAND: We need clarification here, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry. I'm putting the question . . .

MR. KIRKLAND: Are we supportive of the chair's position?

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you supportive of the . . .

MR. FRIEDEL: The challenge would rule the question out of order, Madam Chairman.

9:20

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. It's the question being ruled out of order, not the chair being challenged. Is that what you're saying?

MR. FRIEDEL: Well, you refused to accept my point of order, so I'm challenging you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm not acknowledging the fact that the chair's been challenged along with the question. I'm saying the question is in order.

MR. FRIEDEL: And I'm challenging you, and I'd like to put it to a vote.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's fine. All in favour of . . .

MR. KIRKLAND: All in favour of the chair's ruling?

MR. FRIEDEL: What is the question now? How did you put it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you tell me what your motion is, Gary.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Get on the record.

MR. FRIEDEL: Okay. The way the chair interpreted it, though, was confusing. I am challenging the admissibility of the question, and I'm challenging the chair's not acknowledging my point of order. I am asking for a ruling as to the admissibility of the question.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to clarify. I have accepted your point of order to the chair. I have listened. I have ruled that the question is in order. I thought I heard you saying that you were challenging my ruling as chairman. If that's the case, would you so move so that I can call the question?

MR. FRIEDEL: I will so move.

THE CHAIRMAN: That you're challenging the chair's decision on the Member for Redwater's question?

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, there's an interesting point here. As you're the deputy chairman and you've moved the motion, I have to lead this further. In essence, because I have been challenged, I have to leave the chair and allow you to take the chair. Now, that's interesting inasmuch as you have moved it and you would be chairing it.

MRS. BURGNER: I'll move it.

THE CHAIRMAN: You will move it, Jocelyn?

MRS. BURGNER: I'll move it, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you withdraw your motion then, Gary? I have to clarify.

MR. FRIEDEL: Oh, yes. Okay.

MRS. BURGNER: I so move that we challenge the ruling of the chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. As chairman of Public Accounts, I will now remove myself from the chair and ask the deputy chairman to assume the chair.

[Mr. Friedel in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have just been given the information here. The vote was whether the chairman's ruling shall be supported. If in the affirmative, the chairman's ruling would stand. If the vote is negative, the chairman's ruling is overturned. [interjection] It's nondebtable. Okay; I'll put the question. All in favour of supporting the chairman's ruling? Those opposed? The ruling is overturned.

MR. N. TAYLOR: May I ask for a recorded vote?

MRS. DACYSHYN: I can record it.

[For the motion: Mrs. Burgener, Mr. Coutts, Mr. McFarland, Mr. Pham, Dr. L. Taylor]

[Against the motion: Mr. Kirkland, Dr. Percy, Mr. Sekulic, Mr. N. Taylor]

MR. N. TAYLOR: It's been recorded? Okay.

[Mrs. Abdurahman in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The chair learns something new every day. I guess I'll have to read the procedures a little bit closer.

I'd now like to proceed. Could you ask your first question to the hon. minister, recognizing that your question was ruled out of order?

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'm sorry it was ruled out of order, because it's under vote 1 in each department. So much for equality, as you say.

Let's move, then, to the Auditor General's recommendation 11, buried – I hear little mumblings in the back there – in the third last paragraph. It says:

- Require the Minister to table in the Legislature a combined financial statement on the results of school board operations showing budget and actual information.

Of course, now that the minister and his all-male assistants have decided that there is even stronger control over the boards than you had even in those days, it's more important than ever that this be followed. Can the minister tell us whether it will be followed?

MR. JONSON: Yes, it will be followed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'm sorry. Did he say yes and when?

THE CHAIRMAN: He said yes, it will be followed.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Did he say when he will do it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, if you'd like to clarify.

MR. JONSON: Well, Madam Chairman, the question was asked earlier, and I will briefly summarize the answer. That is that we have under way right now and have provided the school boards with a new and revised budget report form which is designed to provide common and uniform reporting procedures across the province. We have provided a guide to developing school board business plans. When the accountability framework review is completed and we've made decisions, we will be establishing in more detail the overall performance measure structure for the province. That should be in place in the coming year, and then we will have the mechanism in place to adhere to the Auditor General's recommendation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Nick, do you have a supplementary?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yes. That was the first one, wasn't it? In view of the fact that the majority of teachers are women, in votes 1.0.7, 1.0.8, 1.0.9, and 1.0.10, how is the minister ensuring that the women's viewpoint or women's side of it is presented?

THE CHAIRMAN: Nick, I'm having difficulty with your supplementary.

MR. N. TAYLOR: No, no. On Education spending, 1.0.7, 1.0.8, 1.0.9, and 1.0.10 are all departments: communications, human resources, policy and planning. The last time I looked, women were called human and were involved in communications. I want to know how the women's component, in view of the all-male assistants, was introduced into those votes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to answer that, hon. minister?

MR. JONSON: Well, as I understand it, Madam Chairman, the question is: are the views of women being put forward?

MR. N. TAYLOR: In those departments.

THE CHAIRMAN: That would be an interpretation, yes.

MR. JONSON: I'm somewhat surprised by the question, because I know that some of my colleagues, at least on the government side, who are here today and have been extensively involved meeting with teachers in their communities and so on across the province would recognize that in various meetings and consultation processes all people have been represented. Certainly in my experience at least and in their experience, in many of these meetings women are the majority in the audience and certainly likewise are active in making presentations and providing briefs and so forth. So I welcome that; I think that is good. That's been the situation across the province.

THE CHAIRMAN: Final supplementary, Nick.

9:30

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah, a supplementary. It's just an attitude. The hon. member must know that women face an entirely different problem in discipline and security in a classroom than males do.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could we get to the question, please?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yes. This one goes over to native education, 3.2.3. I notice \$469 million was expended. Under the treaty Act, how much of that is reimbursable from the federal government? Shouldn't it all be reimbursable? If it isn't reimbursable, why isn't it?

MR. JONSON: You're referring to our native education?

MR. N. TAYLOR: It's 3.2.3 on page 68, volume 2.

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: Did you forget?

MR. JONSON: Pardon me?

THE CHAIRMAN: Nick, you're out of order.

MR. JONSON: Madam Chairman, I can give the answer. If I hesitate a bit, I'm sure it will be a slower hesitation than the hon. member's time in getting the question asked.

The native education line in our budget, the 3.2.3 category there: some years ago we established a budget line to provide a focus on assisting by the development of native curriculum, working with the bands across the province – for instance, the Blackfoot Nation – to convert and to develop curriculum materials for our native students in the province. We also put some seed money into projects in schools across the province . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: Point of order, Madam Chairman. I didn't ask what it was for. I know what it's for. I'm asking whether it was reimbursable from the federal government, and if it wasn't, why wasn't it?

MR. JONSON: I said that we – that is, the government – had spent money in this regard, and I was explaining the purpose of it, which I think is a legitimate answer, Madam Chairman. I don't really want to argue with hon. members . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: I won't allow you.

MR. JONSON: . . . but I do have to explain. It's rather unusual to be castigated for providing too much information. Since the information is not welcome, the answer is no, this money is not reimbursed by the federal government. The federal government, however, through Indian Affairs and through Indian bands across the province, does have tuition agreements with serving separate and public school boards in the province whereby the federal government does pay for the education of qualified native students from reserves. But this is a specific initiative undertaken and paid for by the Alberta government.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, Nick, I have to rule that you did not have a point of order. I want to make it quite clear that the hon. minister or any representative from the department has the right to answer the question in a broader context, and I think all members welcome that broader context.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Madam Chairman, just knowing how he gets away and down the pasture on me before I slam the gate, I didn't want him to go on for 10 minutes and then stop.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.
Barry.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm on volume 2 of public accounts, page 348, Mr. Minister. I'm about the fourth line down on assistant deputy minister of regional services. My question quite simply is: how is it that the assistant deputy minister has received a pay cut, according to the calculations, of about 23 percent from 1993 to 1994?

MR. JONSON: Which deputy minister are you referring to?

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you clarify which deputy minister.

MR. McFARLAND: Assistant deputy minister, regional services – the second line from the bottom under executives – in 1993 received \$127,504 and in 1994 received \$98,615. That's more than 5 percent, but maybe it's because it's a woman. I don't know.

MR. JONSON: Well, Madam Chairman . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair wants to make a statement at this time. I'm having difficulty with the tone of comments regarding gender during this Public Accounts meeting. It's from both Official Opposition members and government members. It's totally inappropriate.

Hon. minister.

MR. JONSON: Madam Chairman, this individual in 1993 took a payout of vacation pay which he accumulated over obviously a significant period of time, and that meant his reimbursement went up to \$127,000 in that year. That was, as I said, a payout of accumulated vacation pay. Then in 1994 that, of course, did not apply and he was back to his, quote, regular salary.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Supplementary, Barry.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Minister. At the very bottom of that column there is part-time and casual wage staff. I've calculated that they've increased spending about 148,300 and some odd dollars under this category, and I just wondered why, when we're cutting down, this actually increased in '94?

MR. JONSON: I would ask the deputy minister to give details there. The comment I would make is that when we are reducing staff, we do have severance that has to be factored in here so that you get the change made and employees are treated fairly. I'll ask Reno to elaborate that.

DR. BOSETTI: Yes, I'd be happy to. First of all, the total expenditure in salaries and benefits has gone down. In the case of the increase we're speaking about, part-time and casual wage staff, because we applied the voluntary separation allowances, we allowed people to leave whenever they chose to, if you like, before year-end, so the reductions occurred throughout the department in various places. The projects these people were working on had to be concluded, so what we did was use wage staff, if you like, temporary and part-time people, to finish projects in order to allow, to the degree that we could, the individuals who wanted to leave or retire to retire as they chose. We tried to, of course, give them the opportunity to retire when they wanted to.

THE CHAIRMAN: Final supplementary, Barry.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. The second line from the bottom is noninstructional staff. I think I may know the answer,

but why is the average salary increasing about 2.5 percent under these categories for noneducation managers and instructional staff when it appears the staff is reduced by 40 full-time equivalents?

MR. JONSON: Well, the average is going up, Madam Chairman, because the pattern of people taking retirement or taking the severance package is at the lower wage ranges in this section. If people who are at the lower wage categories leave, it pushes your overall average up because the higher paid ones remain.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Barry. Thank you, hon. minister.
Peter Sekulic.

MR. SEKULIC: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, my questions pertain to the annual report of the Auditor General, '93-94, page 49, recommendation 13 regarding cost presentation. A similar question was asked at the very start, but I'd like some clarification. Specifically, my first question pertains to the last two lines on the page where the Auditor General states that "the Department does not know what it costs to produce a graduate." What I'd like to know is: what actions has the department undertaken to address this concern?

9:40

MR. JONSON: Well, Madam Chairman, as I think I indicated but I will repeat it: along with putting in place a standardized reporting format from school boards across the province, having in place additional information systems that are better with respect to getting data to us from the schools, we will be able to provide that cost under our new systems. It's a matter of having the data, being able to make the calculations. We have our funding framework now going into place as of September 1, 1995, and as indicated earlier, in the future we will be able to do it, but we have not had that data up to recent times.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary, Peter.

MR. SEKULIC: Yes. Standardized reporting requires that there are some standards to report. My question is: what are the standards? I know there may be a long list of these and you may not be able to answer this here, but I would appreciate it if I could have a list either here or after this Public Accounts meeting.

MR. JONSON: I think the best way, Madam Chairman, is just to provide to the hon. member a copy of our guide to business plans and our standard reporting form that we have established. It shows that the same format of information has to be provided by school boards all across the province.

THE CHAIRMAN: It would be appreciated if that's done through Corinne so that all members get a copy, hon. minister.

MR. JONSON: Okay. I'm going to make a note to do that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Final supplementary, Peter.

MR. SEKULIC: Yes. Earlier Dr. Bosetti mentioned that there was currently in the department a focus on setting standards, and that was in response to a question regarding curriculum. Given that these standards are essential for standardized reporting because they are the criteria for reporting, I'd like to know: the department sets the budget, but who specifically is setting Alberta's educational standards?

MR. JONSON: Our standards are developed through our student evaluation branch in conjunction with our curriculum branch, but more importantly, when the standards for programs are developed, we work with teachers, with experts in the field of education. A great deal of work is done in this regard, working with people. What we arrived at through looking at data and exchanging expertise was a standard, let us say, for grade 3 reading as to what level of reading a student at that level of maturity should be able to do, and that becomes the acceptable standard for, let us say, the grade 3 reading program for the grade 3 reading achievement test.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Peter.
Lorne Taylor.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes. Page 70, education revenue, transfers from government of Canada, bilingualism.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it volume 2, Lorne?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Yes, volume 2, public accounts.
The grant on bilingualism went from \$19 million to \$17 million. I'm just wondering why it has declined and what portion of that grant goes to Francophone schools.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think you want to correct the numbers.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Oh, yeah: \$19,000 to \$17,000.

MR. JONSON: This is the revenue section, and this is money coming to us from the government of Canada. Your question is with respect to what . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: I wondered: does that money go to Francophone schools, or does it go to other bilingualism programs?

MR. JONSON: The amount of money there is \$17,000. As I recall, this is in support of promoting bilingualism in the province. For exactly who that's paid to, I'd ask the department to respond.

DR. BOSETTI: Part of it will go to the co-ordinating councils, the government side, if you like, of the co-ordination of section 23 of Francophone rights in the province.

MR. JONSON: All that goes in that area.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Could you tell me – I couldn't find it here – what was the total spent on Francophone schools in this budget year? Just approximately. Any idea? It wasn't in an item here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it possible at this time to answer that question, hon. minister, to Dr. Bosetti?

DR. BOSETTI: I wouldn't have the data off the top. We could certainly get it for you. As to the amount that was allocated, we'd have to go through school board records, because in many cases these schools were operated by school boards in the year in question. But we can get the data for you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Final supplementary, Lorne?

DR. L. TAYLOR: No. It was on this one, so I'll pass.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mike Percy.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, my questions fall under vote 3.1.5, page 68 of the public accounts, the Alberta response centres. They concern the School for the Deaf. Could you tell me whether there were any reviews or studies undertaken with regards to changing the structure of the School for the Deaf or the continued operation of the School for the Deaf in this period?

MR. JONSON: Yes, in the sense that we looked at a couple of factors. First of all, I want to say up front that in our work here we've tried to be sensitive to the needs of the School for the Deaf and the parents and the people associated with it, but we looked at the overall cost per student and also some of the challenges of operating the residential program. Enrollment has gone down somewhat in the School for the Deaf, and consequently there are real problems with the economies of scale in terms of a stand-alone school operated directly by the department, and this was also true of the residential program. So after looking at this information a great deal and also looking at it from the point of view of Alberta Education getting out of the direct delivery of education through, quote, its own school, we felt it was fiscally responsible to look at as an alternative, which we're into right now, having a school board operate the School for the Deaf because there would be administrative savings in that regard and you would have a connection with an actual school system rather than being, as I say, an entity by itself operated directly by the province. Then along with better administrative services, the close connection with a school system, and the efficiencies there, we want to make sure the quality program is still there. So those are the considerations we went through in looking at working with a school board to operate the school.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary, Mike.

DR. PERCY: Thank you. In light of your reviews and studies, then, were there also mechanisms put in place to ensure continued access for all Albertans who would wish to use that facility, a co-ordination function with the school board?

MR. JONSON: As I recall, the policy in terms of access to the program has not changed, but enrollment in the School for the Deaf has been going down, which hopefully indicates there are fewer deaf students in the province, but I don't think we can assume that. I think satisfactory service evidently is being provided pretty well all across central Alberta within the regular school systems or by programs in that area. That's just the situation we're facing here.

9:50

DR. PERCY: In light of comments made earlier about interprovincial co-operation in curriculum development and the like, and in light of the high regard in which the School for the Deaf is held – it's an extraordinarily effective program – did the province in light of its reviews and studies ever look at the role that school could play in western Canada as a centre for students with that set of problems?

MR. JONSON: As I understand it, the School for the Deaf here in Edmonton was always available to students from other provinces on a cost recovery basis. I can't tell you right now if we do have any out-of-province students enrolled at the School for the Deaf, but that service has always been there. British Columbia operates its own school. I think it's called Jericho Hill. But yes, that service has been there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Thank you, Mike.
Jocelyn Burgener.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have a question on page 67 of volume 2, public accounts, 2.1.1. I think I'm in the right area, the building and equipment support. I just want to check: is this where the funding for capital expenditure that comes through the building branch is recorded?

MR. JONSON: I haven't got the line. Is it the debenture support line?

MRS. BURGNER: It's under financial assistance to schools, under the foundation program fund. It's broken down into building and equipment support and then student instruction, transportation, and boarding. I want to know if 2.1.1 is where the requests for capital to build schools, et cetera, are?

MR. JONSON: Yes.

MRS. BURGNER: Okay. Then my question is: of the money expended and authorized – obviously you hit exactly the amount of money that you had – could you please tell me how many requests were not honoured? In other words, how short are we in providing for the requested needs of the province of Alberta with respect to this?

MR. JONSON: I would have to provide that detailed information, but I could comment on it, Madam Chairman. What we do with respect to the school buildings program: in 1993-94 we were still in the midst of our five-year, \$700 million, as I recall, building program that had been announced under the previous minister. School boards were invited to submit five-year plans and prioritize their projects. I think you would find, although I think this was a very good and adequate program – I would say that the requests that came in from school boards were probably double that. We will get you the accurate statistics on it. All I'm saying is that school boards looked out to all the possibilities, which is good, and they prioritized things, and I think we can say that over the five years of the program their top priorities have certainly been addressed. We'll get you more detailed statistics on that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supplementary, Jocelyn.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to switch over to page 69, 3.2.2, under the national and international education item. You've spoken a little bit about it this morning. There is an overexpenditure. I have a question with respect to exactly what happens and what is done in national and international education. If I may, Halvar, I don't know that all the detail of that needs to be forthcoming at the moment. I think perhaps we'll just address the overexpenditure. But I would like a full explanation of what we do in those areas. You've spoken to the western protocol and the national one as well with respect to sharing educational issues, so I'll leave that if you can get back to me. My question is: what is that overexpenditure a result of?

MR. JONSON: Well, this is an item of capital investment we made that we had not budgeted for of, I guess, \$9,000 or \$10,000. What specifically it was, I don't know. It doesn't appear anybody else does either. My guess is that it's the replacement of some computer equipment, but we'll find out for you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
A final supplemental?

MRS. BURGNER: No. That's all, thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Because of the hour, I'd now like to move on in the agenda. Before I do that, looking at the procedures for committees, as chair I have to share with you that my interpretation – and it's after the fact – was that a motion actually isn't necessary, that the minute the chair is challenged, automatically the chair vacates. So we didn't follow the procedure as per documented. In essence, it was even more democratic. But I just want the members to be aware of that. My understanding from Corinne is that it's the first time it's happened in six years. I apologize for the fact that I was asking for a motion that indeed was not necessary.

Nick.

MR. N. TAYLOR: As a point of explanation, can a vacated chair then vote?

THE CHAIRMAN: No. It's quite clear that the only time the chair can vote is when there are equal numbers. It clearly states that in essence the chair is used to break a tie, so in this instance or at any other time the chair cannot vote.

I'd like to make the members aware that the date of the next meeting is May 17, and the Hon. Ty Lund, Environmental Protection, will be appearing before us.

I'd like to once again thank the Auditor General and Mike for being in attendance, and thank you, hon. minister and your staff, for appearing before Public Accounts. As I pointed out earlier, we'd welcome if all written answers could go through Corinne so that all members would then have copies. Thank you.

If there's no further business, we stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:58 a.m.]

