



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Monday, September 24, 2012
3:16 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
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Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Kennedy-Glans, Donna, Calgary-Varsity (PC)*
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
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Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL)**
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[Mr. Anderson in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. My name is Rob Anderson, the MLA for Airdrie, and I would like to welcome everyone in attendance as well as those listening online or here in the committee room.

I have notification of two temporary substitutions. I'm informed that Ms Kennedy-Glans will be attending by teleconference on behalf of Ms Pastoor. Ms Kennedy-Glans, are you there? Not there yet. I'm sure she'll be on soon. Then Dr. Sherman is attending on behalf of Mr. Kang, so we'll wait for him as well.

Further, Mr. Allen is attending this meeting by teleconference from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Is that right? Mr. Allen, are you still there?

Mr. Allen: I am here. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Good.

Ms Calahasen should be joining us shortly.

Ms Kennedy-Glans, is that you?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Yes, it is. Hi.

The Chair: Hi. Ms Kennedy-Glans, of course, is the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

We'll go around the table to introduce the folks that are here in attendance, starting with the deputy chair, Mr. Dorward.

Mr. Dorward: David Dorward, deputy chair, Edmonton-Gold Bar MLA.

Dr. Massolin: Philip Massolin, manager of research services.

Mr. Hehr: Kent Hehr, MLA, Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Quadri: Sohail Quadri, MLA, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Amery: Moe Amery, MLA, Calgary-East.

Mr. Stier: Pat Stier, MLA, Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Fenske: Jacquie Fenske, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Webber: Len Webber, Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Fraser: Rick Fraser, Calgary-South East.

Mr. Hale: Jason Hale, MLA, Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Starke: Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mrs. Sarich: Good afternoon. Janice Sarich, MLA, Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bilous: Good afternoon. Deron Bilous, MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms DeLong: Alana DeLong, MLA, Calgary-Bow.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

Mr. Donovan: Ian Donovan, running a couple of minutes late, for Little Bow.

Mr. Anglin: Joe Anglin, running a little bit later than that, MLA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: Now, for committee members, this isn't televised, so if you sneak in late and I give you the chance to introduce yourselves . . .

Mr. Saher: Good afternoon, everyone. Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

The Chair: I'd also like to welcome Dr. Raj Sherman. Of course, he is the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

I'd also like to welcome Geoff Dubrow from the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, or CCAF, for travelling here to assist with our orientation today. For those folks at home, we had a pretty extensive morning and afternoon of training from the Auditor General, from Mr. Dubrow, as well as from folks at the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance. It was to help train new members and old members on this committee about their responsibilities on the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Len Derkach, the former chair of the Manitoba Public Accounts Committee, is here, and we'd like to welcome him as well. He was there for the training as well and offered some very insightful recommendations and teaching.

I'd also like to welcome, of course, Rob Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations.

And, of course, Chris Tyrell is experiencing his first Public Accounts meeting on his first day here as committee clerk. He'll be taking over for Corinne. Chris's background is with the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. He's made the move from Toronto to Edmonton. Fantastic decision, Chris. One of his responsibilities will be clerking the Public Accounts Committee, and I know you've all had an opportunity to welcome him today.

And, of course, Corinne. We still have you for a couple more committee meetings, don't we?

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Sure.

The Chair: So that'll be for a few more committee meetings before you hand over the reins entirely to Chris. She has been with us for 19 years doing committee work, and I think she's been here 23 years in total, so she is the veteran at this table.

Also, one of my favourite MLAs in the world just showed up. Introduce yourself.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Good to have you.

Now, just a few housekeeping items before we turn to the business at hand. A reminder that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Audio of committee proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website. All of this will be recorded on the *Hansard*.

The next piece of business. The agenda has been circulated to you previously. Would there be anyone willing to move that the agenda for this meeting, September 24, 2012, be approved as distributed? Mr. Hehr. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

Approval of the minutes. You've all had the minutes of the last meeting, our first meeting of this Public Accounts Committee after the last election. They were circulated previously. Is there a member that would like to move that the minutes for the May 30, 2012, Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting be

approved as distributed? Mrs. Sarich. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

All right. Now we'll go into a bit of a discussion about the main reason we came here today: some of the recommendations that we received today from the Auditor General, from CCAF, as well as regarding our discussion with Finance and Treasury. Our deputy chair, David Dorward, and I had the opportunity, as we mentioned, to attend the annual conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees on tropical Baffin Island this summer. Although the weather wasn't the greatest, we did have the opportunity to learn from our colleagues across the country.

Of particular interest were multiple sessions on best practices and solutions from across the country. An important nugget, I think, that we both took away as well as Mr. Hale and Mr. Allen, who were also there, was the need to make sure that we implement the best practices possible to make this committee as effective and as nonpartisan as possible so we can all do our job here, which is, of course, to hold government departments accountable for how they're spending Albertans' money and that they're implementing the recommendations of the Auditor General. If not, what are the reasons for that? So there's transparency.

3:25

It also became clear through the discussions there that the biggest responsibility – and we talked about that today – of PACs around the country was to consider the reports of the Auditor General as they come out. In fact, in some cases that's, essentially, exclusively what PACs do. I'm not saying that we need to follow that practice by any stretch, but certainly it was a learning experience to see that virtually all other committees put that, essentially, as their number one priority, to examine the Auditor General reports.

Of course, during discussions at the conference and subsequent meetings with CCAF officials the deputy chair and I came away with a clear understanding of the need for proper training and orientation for the entire committee, which is why we have organized this session today and are open to doing something even more advanced, perhaps, in the future if you as committee members feel the need. We'd be more than happy to do that. Geoff alluded to some possibilities in that regard earlier.

A document was circulated earlier to members on some potential motions that myself and Mr. Dorward have discussed. My suggestion is that it's in order to try and implement some of the things we've learned today. What I'd like to do is read them into the record. Then maybe we could go one by one, discuss the reasoning behind them, and then hopefully vote on each of them individually or amend them individually, et cetera. I'm just going to read the first one into the record, and then we'll have a discussion and go from there. Let's move it when we think we have agreement.

The first one is a motion that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts make it a priority to schedule, as soon as practicable, consideration of all reports of the Auditor General as they are released. The reason for this is pretty straightforward from what we learned today. It was that we just make it a priority. We didn't want to put any specific timelines on it because, you know, things can get tricky when we're in session, trying to schedule things and so forth. One thing that is pretty clear is that we want to make sure that on a go-forward when the Auditor General puts out a report, we have the flexibility as a committee to immediately address that report as soon as we can, as soon as it's practical to do so, and invite the relevant people, the deputy ministers and witnesses, et cetera, in order to properly consider those reports.

That's kind of the reasoning behind it, and I'll just open it up for questions and comments.

Ms DeLong.

Ms DeLong: Okay. I'm trying to understand what the change would be here because I do know that in the past as soon as a report was tabled, we had access to it. In the very next meeting of Public Accounts, we would be asking questions from it, essentially. So I guess I don't understand what this change is. You know, what change are we looking at here? As it is now, we do have it. We do have it, and we do use it.

The Chair: Yeah. Absolutely, Ms DeLong. Just to answer your question quickly, there's no doubt we do have access. Those reports are tabled. What this would change is – not necessarily change, but it would essentially have the committee give direction that when these reports are tabled in the Legislature, we will make it a priority to set aside a specific committee meeting to go over that specific report. That is something, certainly in the two years that I was on the committee previously, that was never done. When you have a department in, you can ask questions concerning that report in the meeting, but it was part of it. You'd be covering the entire ministry, so you might get a couple of questions on the Auditor General's report, but it was so broad that we didn't really have time to actually address the specific recommendations of the report in any kind of fulsome manner, fulsome discussion.

It's really just a way of kind of concentrating, limiting our discussion for a meeting, just for a meeting, on that specific report or items in the report.

Ms DeLong: In other words, what we would be doing is that we would be talking about it, but we wouldn't have a department here to ask questions of it, so essentially we would lose a meeting to it.

The Chair: The intent of the motion is, actually, not to do that. The intent of the motion is that we would invite whoever is relevant to that meeting. For example, when we invite the minister, if we were going to do the report on the July 2012 Auditor General's report, if we were going to do a meeting on that and consider it, we would invite, obviously, the Auditor General. We would also invite the Department of Health. Then we would in our letter direct them to be prepared for a discussion on the recommendations specifically in the July 2012 report, which have to do primarily with primary care networks in that regard. The discussion would be for that hour and a half on the recommendations regarding Health for that specific report. That's kind of the difference between what we usually do and what we're suggesting here.

The deputy chair.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. I'd like to speak in favour of this. I think what it does is it elevates the importance of already having a body of knowledge available to us to be able to help guide us towards being most efficient in our deliberations as quickly as we can. We will literally have a potential checklist of items in the Auditor General's report, whether it's the fall report, which tends to be the bigger one, or typically the March or July report, whichever one. It allows us to be able to have access to a body of information and knowledge that's available for us to dive in and get effective fairly quickly with respect to how we best spend the time that we're going to spend.

The motion is very soft in the sense that it doesn't demand that we do anything in particular. It may not, as you say, even expand what the committee could have done before, but it certainly, I think, gives us direction that the Auditor General's report is

important and should as quickly as possible be used by us to be able to frame the work that we do thereafter.

Mr. Anglin: I have a point of order. Are we discussing a motion? The motion hasn't been made yet, right?

The Chair: I thought what we'd do is that we would just have a general discussion and then make the motion after that if that's okay. I guess we could put the motion on the floor if we wanted.

Mr. Dorward: Any committee member can make a motion any time they want.

The Chair: We do have four motions in about half an hour or so. Hopefully, we can keep comments concise and have some votes on this stuff.

Mr. Hehr: Well, when this motion is put on the floor, I will be voting for it. I think it allows for a timely mechanism for us to deal with things emanating from the Auditor General, which appears to be the primary role of this committee. If we look at these reports when they come out, it's obviously pertinent to the future of Alberta, and we should get on it right away. These things tend to get stale-dated. They tend to get worked on by other organizations and the like. We should do our due diligence and add our two cents to the conversation as quickly as possible. I would be very supportive of that for that reason, so that our committee can have an impact on the future direction of whatever action the ministries are going to take.

Mr. Anglin: I'm going to move the motion. Do you want me to read it?

The Chair: Well, let's go to Mrs. Sarich first.

Mr. Anglin: Well, I thought you said that anyone can move the motion at any time.

The Chair: In the order of the speakers list, Joe.

Mr. Anglin: Well, point of order. I'm a little uncomfortable discussing a motion without a motion made. Just a point of order.

The Chair: Okay. Duly noted.
Mrs. Sarich and then Mr. Anglin.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would suggest that if you would like to consider the moving of the motion at this juncture, I don't have any difficulty even though I'm in this order of your recognition. If that would allow, you know, committee members to feel a little bit more comfortable, I don't see any harm. After that is done, then I have a point.

The Chair: Mrs. Sarich, would you like to move it? Go ahead.

Mrs. Sarich: Yes. So moved as previously read into the record. Is that acceptable, or would you like that reread?

The Chair: We'll accept that. Moved by Mrs. Sarich that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts make it a priority to schedule, as soon as practicable, consideration of all reports of the Auditor General as they are released.
Anybody like to speak to the motion?

3:35

Ms Calahasen: Like Ms DeLong, I'm not exactly sure what we're trying to do here. I thought we already have the priority to be able to do that. Are we just putting it so that it becomes a written

format, or are we just doing it so that it changes it to "as they are released" versus the Auditor General's report released as a general thing? I'm not exactly sure what we're trying to do here. Can you explain it again, Mr. Chair, if you can? That would give me an understanding and maybe a comfort zone here.

The Chair: Absolutely. This actually would be a departure from past practice, and that's why we wanted to make sure the entire board had buy-in on this. Essentially, as soon as an Auditor General's report is released, we would dedicate a specific meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to consideration of that specific report, only that report. In the example here, the July 2012 report, we would say: "We're going to look at the section dealing with primary care networks, whatever, in the Auditor General's report. In order to do that, we're going to invite the Auditor General, and we're going to invite the Department of Health. This is what we're going to talk about." They need to be prepared for that, and we prepare accordingly, so we really spend just one meeting specifically on that particular thing.

Ms Calahasen: Further on that, Mr. Chair, what we're doing, then, is not necessarily doing what we've done in the past, which is that when the Auditor General's report comes out, we immediately go into the Auditor General's report and deal with his report. You're talking about specific themes within the report, getting the Auditor General here to speak on those specific areas. That's what you're talking about?

The Chair: That's right.

Ms Calahasen: So it would be specific dates other than the days that we would be choosing as a committee, or, like Ms DeLong said, would we lose those days?

The Chair: They would be those days that we've already set aside, so every Wednesday meeting. For example, instead of having Health come in to just talk about the broad Department of Health – and anything goes on that subject – we would actually bring them in just to examine what was in the report, so we could narrow the focus of the discussion for that day.

Mr. Saher: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to try and help by the change that I see. Traditionally the committee has looked out into the future and produced a schedule of ministries and departments that it would like to appear, and that sometimes goes out six months, quite a long period. For example, say that you had done that, and I am about to release a report in about a month's time. Up until now you wouldn't have altered that schedule, but the report may contain something that the committee views as worth having a meeting on, not with me but with the departmental managers who manage that program. My sense is that this motion is, I think, putting on the table the prospect that you would be guided by the most recent work of the audit office in setting your schedule.

Mr. Chair, I hope I haven't gone off in the wrong way there.

The Chair: I don't think you've gone off at all. That was very good.
Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Out of respect for the work that the Auditor General's office does and the duty of this committee to make sure Albertans' dollars are used wisely, I think the motion is quite explicit and clear in what it intends, and I support the motion.

The Chair: Can we take a vote on this, or are there any other speakers? No?

I call the question. All in favour of the motion? Any opposed? Carried.

All right. I'm going to defer to Mr. Dorward on Motion 2 as this was kind of something that he has spearheaded.

Mr. Dorward: Can I make a motion? I think I can as the deputy chair.

The Chair: Yeah, you can. That's right.

Mr. Dorward: I will move that the chair, deputy chair, and one representative from the Liberal and New Democratic caucuses form an ongoing informal working group that will meet to discuss and prepare recommendations to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts as to what departments, reports, or other items should be considered at future Public Accounts Committee meetings.

I'll alter it just a slight little bit to add the Auditor General in there as well, as one of the individuals that would be a member of that informal working group.

May I speak to the motion, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Dorward: I think this is a wonderful thing. I think it'll make it so that we get at the business of the committee faster in the sense that we will of course come to that meeting having dialogued with our own caucus that sits on this committee and then bring to that table discussion of what kinds of things we think we want to look at in the next few meetings as far out as we have to go to give the connected parties time to be able to get ready for the meeting. I think this will set a nice sense of us getting at the work a little bit faster than coming to a meeting and spending time at the meeting deliberating at that level about what we should do.

That's the intent. The intent is not to make any decisions – we tried to find words that would fit that; “informal working group” is not a decision-making body – but certainly to come to this committee and say: this is what we think we could proceed with, and do you concur? Then, of course, everybody at the committee level has the opportunity to change that.

The Chair: Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm wondering, after today's presentation, about some possible structures. You had mentioned that this informal working group would also include the Auditor General and the clerk. I believe that in the previous presentations a researcher from the clerk's area was another potential individual that could be part of this.

Because it was also raised – and I don't know how it would apply – the question I would have: maybe some flexibility for this informal working group to call, when necessary, our Controller on the Finance side if that would help out in preparation of the items that were under consideration and guide the informal working group to make proposals to the Public Accounts Committee as a whole. I'm not too sure how you need to build that one in.

Then I had another question. I'm wondering: does this particular group go by the title informal working group? Is that what we're establishing by name, or is there a requirement that it has to be identified as something else? I'd like some clarification on that; for example, Public Accounts working group as a title. Or do we go with what is stated in the motion so that it would be identified for the purposes of *Hansard* as some entity?

The Chair: Sure. We could name it that. This is not meant to be an official committee of the Legislature by any stretch because I don't think we have, really, the right to do that without amending the standing orders and so forth. This would be a completely informal working group. If we want to call it an informal working group for the Public Accounts Committee, that's fine with me. I have no problem with that. I don't know if it's necessary or not.

Mrs. Sarich: Okay. Just kind of going back to the addition of these other individuals, does it make sense at this time, from what we've learned in the presentations that started this morning and into the afternoon, to have that inclusion of those other individuals? Or maybe it's covered under the flexibility to add those individuals at the discretion of the working group.

Mr. Dorward: I'll take some direction from the chair on this, but I certainly don't mind amending my motion to include the researcher and the committee clerk. I'll revise my motion in that regard.

Mrs. Sarich: What about the Controller, then?

The Chair: Case by case.

Mrs. Sarich: As needed?

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. Others as needed.

Mrs. Sarich: Or others as needed. Sure.

Mr. Hehr: I believe this is a very good motion. I'll be supporting it. I think we learned from the CCAF presentation this morning that a steering committee or an informal working group, whatever you want to call it, tends to make things run a little smoother. Everyone can get their ideas out on the floor from the various caucuses. Any questions or the like can be dealt with at that time. When we get to the meeting, we can actually deal with the priorities at hand. I think it's a very good motion, and I would urge all members of this committee to support it.

3:45

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hehr.

Any others, or can we put the question?

Mr. Dorward moved that the chair, deputy chair, one representative from the Liberal and New Democrat caucuses, the Auditor General, the committee clerk, and the committee researcher form an ongoing informal working group that will meet to discuss and prepare recommendations to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts as to what departments, reports, or other items should be considered at future Public Accounts Committee meetings.

All those in favour of the motion as amended, say aye. All opposed? If anybody on the conference call is opposed or wants to say aye real loud, they can do that. They can say in favour or they can say opposed very loudly, and we'll note it.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: It's Donna. I'm totally in favour. This process has worked really well on the standing committee.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Ms Kennedy-Glans.

All right. Let's move to motions 3 and 4. These motions are kind of together, but we separated them just to be clean about it. Essentially, they address the same issue.

With regard to Motion 1 we thought that we want to address these reports of the Auditor General. We have an opportunity right

away. We have Health coming in as our first. The Department of Health is already scheduled to come in. We thought that when they do come in, we should write to them and say: be prepared to talk about what's in the July 2012 report on primary care networks as Mr. Saher suggested earlier in the day. I think it's a great suggestion. That would be easy enough, but we would need a motion to do that.

The other part of it is that when we met last time, we essentially kind of did a laundry list. We just picked six, seven random ministries – important ministries, for sure – but said that we were just going to bring them in because it was our first meeting. We did that. We passed a motion to that effect. What we were thinking of doing is altering, revising that motion to essentially say that the ministries to appear before the committee during the fall 2012 sitting to begin with would be Health, Education – those two were in the original motion – and then Treasury Board and Finance, which would be a change. I think they were fourth or fifth down, but we would move them up to number 3.

That's it for now so that the working group can get together and talk about future possible schedules and come back with recommendations going forward rather than just kind of being random about it. That would accomplish that.

Then the fourth motion kind of goes hand in hand. When Treasury Board comes in and when Health comes in, they would be asked to specifically deal with the recommendations from the July 2012 Auditor General's report. For the first three weeks that would give us a good itinerary of how we wanted to proceed with the July 2012. If we can get that one done quickly, then we'll be just in time to hear the Auditor General's November report, which will be coming out soon. That's why we want to get things done quicker if possible.

Ms DeLong: I'm a little confused here. We were going to have Health in, but we wanted to respond better to the Auditor General. But the Auditor General's report is mostly about the PCNs, and PCNs come under AHS. So who are we actually inviting in?

The Chair: Mr. Saher, could you explain the reasoning for that?

Mr. Saher: We've made recommendations to both the Department of Health and AHS.

Ms DeLong: It is mostly AHS. That was my reading of it.

Mr. Saher: No, I don't think so. We've taken a view that for the organizational structures with respect to the PCNs the Department of Health plays a primary role in setting that framework.

The Chair: I would be more than happy, Ms DeLong, to invite a representative from AHS to also come in and participate if that's what you think is needed.

Mr. Saher: If I could just supplement, so that expectations are fully met, I was going to recommend to you that in your invitation to the Ministry of Health to appear, if it is your expectation that you have someone from AHS able to speak to the PCNs, you make it clear that that is your expectation.

The Chair: Great idea. Would that be an acceptable change to the motion, Ms DeLong?

Ms DeLong: Yes.

The Chair: Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The primary care network is a trilateral process between Alberta Health, AHS, and the Alberta Medical Association. May I make an addition that the Alberta Medical Association also be invited as they have been an equal partner with the department and AHS in working on primary care networks?

The Chair: I'm going to have to get an opinion on that. Are we permitted to invite a representative from the AMA to something like this? Is that permitted? Rob Reynolds, it falls to you.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd have to consider it. I mean, generally speaking, Public Accounts invites bodies who in some way are related to government, government agencies, boards, commissions, because they receive money from the public purse, as it were, so they could be accountable. You've had, I believe, AHS before, obviously, and AGLC if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Saher: Yes.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes.

I'm not aware, but I could do some research as to whether a group that hasn't actually been the subject of review of its financial records, as it were, has been invited to Public Accounts. I'm not sure. Corinne may be able to shed some light on that.

The Chair: I might suggest, Dr. Sherman, that for the purposes of this, because we're specifically going to be examining the report of the Auditor General and his specific recommendations to AHS and to the Department of Health and because he doesn't make any recommendations to the AMA and just in the interests of the fact that we only have an hour and a half to begin with as well, perhaps we could limit it to those two to begin with. Then maybe we can get some research done. If in future, when we examine these reports, can we ask outside groups to come forward and be a part of the examination, so to speak?

Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In that case, I'll withdraw that subject to the advice and wisdom of Mr. Reynolds and go back to the previous motion.

The Chair: Yes, Dr. Starke.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if this is something that can be brought up through the subcommittee to be put on the agenda, and perhaps this was already handled by Public Accounts before this particular committee was struck. I'm just looking at the report card on postsecondary institutions, and I would suggest that in light of some of the findings from the March 2012 Auditor General's report we should include in our list the officials from the ministry of advanced education by way of the review of the March report. I mean, we're looking at the July 2012 report, not the March 2012. Maybe you can tell me. Maybe that was already looked after by the previous Public Accounts Committee.

The Chair: No, I don't think it was, but I think that would be an excellent suggestion for the steering committee to consider.

Mr. Dorward: Let's just mention, and our clerk can confirm this, that the committee did already issue letters in regard to visiting with Health and also with Education, so there's a bit of reluctance to change those first two. Is this true?

Dr. Starke: I've no problem with the ones that are already on the list. I'm just saying: let's not forget the March 2012 report. This deals with advanced education, and certainly we have some institutions that we really need to ask some very specific questions of.

The Chair: I completely agree with that. I think this would be a great example of keeping the ideas coming in through David and myself and the other steering committee members. Then we can come back with a recommendation for exactly that type of thing. Perhaps in the fall we can set aside one day for advanced education for that reason.

Dr. Starke: Sure.

The Chair: Go on, Ms DeLong.

Ms DeLong: Yes. Why are we including treasury branch . . .

The Chair: Treasury Board and Finance?

Ms DeLong: Yeah.

The Chair: The reason that they were asked, that we were going to put them up to third, is because Health and Education have already been asked to come in, so we didn't want to change the invitation on them. For one thing, we already physically sent them the invitations.

3:55

We wanted to address the other main part of the Auditor General's report for July 2012, which does deal with recommendations to Treasury Board and Finance. Those were the two main parts. So we were hoping, in the interest of getting the July 2012 report taken care of and considered prior to the Auditor General bringing forward his November report, that we could move them up in the rotation and get that taken care of so that we can get that put off our plate. That's the reasoning.

Ms DeLong: Just sort of a quick review of this in terms of the Department of Treasury Board and Finance. Most of the recommendations have to do with their relation to the other departments in terms of their performance measurements. Performance measurements are something that I always ask questions on in Public Accounts. Something that I always pay attention to is: what are we really trying to accomplish here? I'm usually one of those ones who is sort of really on top of these performance measurements and any variations in the performance measurements which make it difficult to understand where we're going in a particular department.

I just would think that we might sort of keep this in mind when we're talking to all the other departments to essentially support the Auditor General in this work. To put the Treasury Board on the hot seat right now to be able to follow up with these recommendations really quickly is going to be quite difficult, it seems to me. These are the kinds of things that we will see results for two, three years down the line as the Treasury department puts pressure on this. In terms of where we're going to go with it in the short term, I'm a little concerned that we might not get much value out of this one.

The Chair: Mr. Dorward.

Mr. Dorward: Yes. I tend to agree with you in the sense that there may not be a body of information available big enough to consume an hour and a half of questioning on that particular issue, but I was happy to put that one on the list and would support leaving it there from the perspective that there's a tremendous amount in Finance. I think that we could add to that conversation a lot of information

from the annual report which would be of value to everybody here in terms of asking them questions about the Alberta Treasury Board or other things that are contained in this report.

The idea was that this one wouldn't be totally – I guess I'd say as a global comment that all of our examination doesn't need to be on the Auditor General's report. It can guide us and direct us, but we certainly have the access to the information that is produced by the ministry itself that we can take a look at as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there someone prepared to move Motion 3 as slightly amended? Mr. Anglin has moved that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts revise its May 30, 2012, motion on the ministries to appear before the committee during the fall 2012 sitting to the following: Health with a representative from Alberta Health Services, Education, and Treasury Board and Finance.

Those in favour? Opposed? On the phone? All good? Okay.

Motion 4. Could we have a mover in that regard? Mr. Hehr moves that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts ask Alberta Health and Alberta Treasury Board and Finance to address the recommendations contained in the July 2012 report of the Auditor General of Alberta when they appear before us in the fall.

All in favour? Any opposed? Phones are good? Okay. Carried.

Now, I'm going to quickly address – and I know we're going to probably run about two or three minutes over time, but I promise we'll keep this short. We've done most of the major stuff here. We don't have time to get into a discussion of this because I know it will turn into an hour long. As chair I have the somewhat dubious privilege of chairing these meetings and moderating these meetings. What I want to do is to try to make this as nonpartisan as possible. Obviously, there are politics involved in everything to some extent, but the PAC is supposed to be different in that we are really supposed to keep these departments accountable for how they're spending the money, and that applies as much to government members as opposition members.

That said, I do feel that I need as chair to run meetings in a fair way, where time allocations and things like that are known in advance, so that I'm not constantly being second-guessed as being biased or anything like that. If we just kind of wing it out there and say, "Oh, just, you know, whoever puts their hand up first goes" and, you know, that kind of whatever happens happens, I think that could lead to some friction. I think we need to have some sort of parameters.

What I'm suggesting – and I'm not going to take a vote on this. This is not a motion. As your committee chair this is how I intend to run the meetings. If there are motions to the contrary, if there is an alternative set of motions or ideas that folks want to see, then by all means come to me after. We'll discuss it. We can discuss it at the next meeting, put a time on for it, et cetera. But this is where my head is at so that when you come next time, you're not completely surprised.

What I wanted to do is follow the precedent of this committee in the past as well as in the Legislature when we're debating bills and so forth, that we go and have an even proportion of time between government and opposition parties. It's going to have to be somewhat flexible because, you know, I don't want to cut people off right at 60 seconds. They might want to gasp out their last sentence, and that's okay.

If, say, we have an hour left in a meeting for questions after a presentation from our guests, having it be, you know, 30 minutes for government, 30 minutes for opposition, rotating back and forth, I think that that would be a good idea. Between opposition

parties, of the 50 per cent of the time allocated to opposition parties, my intent is to give half that time to the five members of the Wildrose caucus and 25 per cent of that time to the two members of the Liberal and the one member of the NDP caucus. We would divide that up according to the minutes. With the hour example, that would leave half an hour for the government, 15 minutes for the Wildrose, seven and a half each for the third and fourth parties. That's my intention.

The other thing I want to change, tweak just a little bit from before, is that if caucuses want to get together and they actually want to take block allocations of the time granted to them – let's say that the government caucus wanted to take their half an hour, split it up between three folks that are experts in this area, and give them 10 minutes each to get to the bottom of some issue – that's fine. If the Liberals or an ND member or a Wildrose member wanted to take their entire time at once or split between two people, whatever, that's fine. I can accommodate that as long as you get that information to me in advance so I know. I want to be flexible as much as possible so that we can all accomplish our goals on this committee.

That's where I'm at. We can change that as a group. If you have any other ideas in that regard, please come to me, and we'll discuss them and so forth.

I've already got questions. I'm just going to take three because we're not going to vote on anything here.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Chair, I'm glad you've given some thought to it, and I thought some good ideas also came forward in the CCAF presentation this morning. I was very intrigued to learn that many of the other provincial Legislatures' PACs and formerly, I guess, the federal government would actually allot certain times to caucuses, and it was allotted not based on seat representation, which, of course, I would like. You know what I'm saying? That's the way it is.

In my view, when I've been to Public Accounts, I haven't found it, really, a great process. When I fire off one question, it goes to the other side. It moves on to the next. I don't think that allows for trying to get to the nub of what you or your caucus is trying to get at in some way. I found the discussion with CCAF very enlightening, and I would actually ask if we could get research to show us what other Legislatures are doing so we can sort of go in to see what other models are. Then we can make a more fair and balanced decision on what may be the best way forward. That's what I would request.

4:05

The Chair: Thank you. Yeah, we'll get to the research request. That's good.

Mrs. Sarich and then Mr. Anglin.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Perhaps your proposal, you know, should be strongly considered by our committee with the proviso of flexibility for reconsideration or re-evaluation after. Let's try it and see how it is working for the committee membership.

I'm also very pleased at some of the other information that we gathered today from the presentations. Since you, you know, informally have raised not only this particular consideration, I would like to know: what about consideration for the in camera briefing and the duration of the meetings of the Public Accounts Committee to encompass a full agenda of what we would like to accomplish over the next year? Perhaps we have to have further consideration of those two elements so that we can get things working.

I know that the meeting is running over time, but perhaps that could be referred back to the working committee with a recommendation, or because there doesn't seem to be enough time to kind of go with that unless we have confidence today that we would like something like that structured, maybe you'd come back with a proposal of how that would work.

The Chair: I'd be more than happy, Mrs. Sarich. Great suggestion.

I think that the steering committee should absolutely, you know, work with Geoff and the Auditor General to go over what those in camera meetings would look like and what kind of briefings would be there as well as the time we would need to do it. We might have to stretch these meetings from an hour and a half to two hours in order to accomplish what we're talking about here. So we'll work – and I'm sure he'll come to your caucus, and I'll go to my caucus – and so forth and figure out what makes sense.

Mr. Anglin, then Mr. Hehr real quickly.

Mr. Hehr: I'm good.

Mr. Anglin: The only thing I'm concerned about and the only thing I really care about is quality and efficiency, and I'm willing to try any methodology to achieve that goal. So if what we try does not work, then I would invite us to come back and change it.

The Chair: Yeah. Good point, Mr. Anglin.

Mrs. Sarich, just so it's completely understood, you know, if this committee passes a motion that only government members will ask questions, they have that power. That's the thing. I work at the discretion of this committee, so if we feel that what we're doing here is out of line with what's happened in other... [interjection] Don't get any ideas there, Ms Calahasen.

If it's out of line with what we're doing in other jurisdictions or if it's not fair, if we need more structure, whatever, by all means. I mean, let's talk about a motion, and it'll be introduced. You have every right to do that. We can always revisit stuff.

I'm just going to wrap up real quick here. Further to the motions that were passed today, the first three regular meetings of the fall sitting will be scheduled, and the informal working group will meet to consider the schedule for the remaining meetings of the fall sitting and bring forth recommendations to the committee on October 24.

The meetings so far. On October 24, of course, it will be Alberta Health, who has already confirmed. They'll be asked to invite a representative from Alberta Health Services to attend that. We will further send a note of clarification to them saying that we will be discussing the Auditor General's July 2012 report further to today's motion. On October 31 it will be Alberta Education. That has been confirmed. On November 7 it is Alberta Treasury Board and Finance, and we'll need to send a note to them as well that they will be not only invited but invited to discuss the Auditor General's report for 2012 among other things.

Mr. Dorward: Actually, constituency week is November 7, I think.

The Chair: Okay. So we'll have to switch that.

Mr. Dorward: It's November 14.

The Chair: November 14?

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Chair, it's the week, I believe, of November 12.

The Chair: Right. Do you get a constituency week, too?

Mr. Reynolds: We just follow the members, as always.

The Chair: Okay. So November 7 is correct.

Next point of business. As we've heard today, research is, obviously, an integral part of our committee. We had a request from Mr. Hehr earlier on other practices with regard to time allocation. Mr. Hehr, would you like to give a motion in that regard?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. I would request that

the researcher look at practices across Canada in both the provincial and territorial Legislatures as well as our federal government to allow us to assess what practice would work best here in Alberta with respect to question rotation.

If anyone wants to help me out with that, feel free to help.

The Chair: All in favour? Any opposed? Carried. On the phone.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Good. Thanks.

Mr. Allen: I'm in favour.

The Chair: All right. Because if you're not in favour, it's gone, man.

Let's do some quick other business here.

Dr. Massolin: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt. I know we're really short on time, but can I get direction on other research for these upcoming meetings?

The Chair: You know what? Let me give a suggestion for the steering committee. I'm asking every single member that wants some research done with regard to what we're doing here to please give it through your caucus representative on that steering committee, and then we'll bring back a recommendation at the next meeting in that regard. Is that fair? Is that a good way to do it?

Okay. Is there any other business committee members wish to raise at this time?

Mr. Dorward: Yes. Just for the record four members of this committee attended the national conference in Iqaluit, and I thank the committee for that motion. It was very valuable, and we should consider that again for the future.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The date of our next meeting will be Wednesday, October 24, at 8:30 a.m.

Could we have a motion to adjourn? Mr. Bilous. All in favour? Great. Thanks for coming today, everyone. We're adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 4:12 p.m.]

