



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Public Accounts

Tuesday, June 11, 2019  
9:15 a.m.

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[Ms Phillips in the chair]

**The Chair:** All right, friends. I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance. My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West, the chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

For the record I'd just like to start on my right with the deputy chair for introductions around the table for the benefit of the public record, please.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Richard Gotfried, deputy chair and MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Garth Rowswell, MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

**Mr. Stephan:** Jason Stephan, MLA for Red Deer-South.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

**Mr. Amery:** Mickey Amery, MLA for Calgary-Cross.

**Mr. Turton:** Searle Turton, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

**Mr. Walker:** Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park.

**Ms Rosin:** Miranda Rosin, Banff-Kananaskis.

**Mr. Toor:** Devinder Toor, Calgary-Falconridge.

**Mr. Barnes:** Drew Barnes, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Wylie:** Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

**Mr. Feehan:** Richard Feehan, Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Ms Renaud:** Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

**Mr. Dach:** Lorne Dach, Edmonton-McClung. Good morning.

**Ms Hoffman:** Sarah Hoffman, Edmonton-Glenora.

**Mrs. Sawchuk:** Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you, everyone, and welcome.

The microphones are operated by *Hansard* now that we're in this portion, so we'll all have to remind ourselves of that, including me. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent, obviously, for the duration of this meeting. These committee proceedings, for everyone's reminder, are live streamed on the Internet, broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV, and all of the audio, video, and transcripts of meetings can be accessed on the Legislature Assembly website.

We'll now move on to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda, colleagues? Seeing none, would a member like to move that the agenda for the June 11 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? I have a mover in Member Feehan. Seconders are not required for an agenda motion. All in favour? All right. Any opposed? All right. The motion is carried. Thank you.

Now we have the approval of the minutes for the June 4 meeting. If members have had a chance to review those minutes, do you have any amendments to the June 4 meeting minutes? If not, would a member then move that the minutes of the June 4, 2019, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? I have a mover in Member Turton. I do not believe I need a seconder on this. Any discussion on the motion, colleagues?

Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is now carried.

Now we have the recommendations from the subcommittee on committee business. You have before you the report of the subcommittee on committee business, and we have some decision points regarding committee scheduling and other business. We met yesterday, June 10, 2019, in regard to developing a proposed schedule for the committee and other matters of business as per the direction of the committee. That sounds confusing. As per the direction of this committee, the subcommittee met yesterday.

A report of the subcommittee, which is comprised, just for review by the public and others, of the chair, deputy chair, and officials, was posted to the committee's internal website. The subcommittee is recommending that the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation attend the June 18 meeting – that's next week – to continue for committee members the orientation that addresses the best practices for the Public Accounts Committee. That's item 1.

Further, we are recommending that the AG, the Auditor General, attend the June 25 meeting to address the ministries which have recommendations from the OAG outstanding for three or more years and to provide an overview of the AG's November 2018 report.

We are further recommending, item 3, a committee business meeting on July 2 to address additional scheduling and that our committee hold two out-of-session meetings, one in September and one in October.

Fifth, the subcommittee is also recommending that we adopt the proposed time allotment format for Q and A, questions and answers, during the meetings with ministries, agencies, boards, and commissions.

I would now like to open the floor for discussion on this report and the recommendations that we have proposed for consideration. I see Member Hoffman to open up the discussion. I will be just keeping a list up here, and if you cannot get my attention, feel free to interject.

Thank you, members.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. Thank you very much for exercising the direction that we gave as a committee. I think that these three upcoming meetings seem reasonable for a very high-level introduction to these sorts of areas. What I would love to do is to create a further mandate, that individual members bring forward to the chair and/or deputy chair recommendations of who they'd like to bring forward in the fall – I think that this is reasonable for what we have in the remainder of the spring, but I'd really like to roll our sleeves up in the fall – and have an opportunity to give some advice on organizations that we could bring forward or departments that we could bring forward. Today I'm very happy to speak in support of the recommendations that are being brought forward. I think it's reasonable and seems to follow past practice, which I think is also important.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Member Hoffman, that's good feedback, I think, for the committee. Given that we essentially provided for that little bit of a time period to get our feet under us, such that we are making some of those decisions at the July 2 meeting, I think it would be appropriate for members to have between now and, let's say, the end of June to communicate with the subcommittee: "Here are my hopes, wishes, and desires for the future in terms of entities, whether they are ministries or associated ABCs that fall within the consolidation process, to have those come to us prior to the July 2 meeting. We will inform you of when the subcommittee is meeting

so that we can take that feedback and weave it into our work.” Does that sound reasonable to members assembled? All right.

Please go ahead.

**Ms Hoffman:** Just a final point of clarity. Sometimes when I think of ABCs, I think of government agencies, boards, and commissions, but it could include anyone who’s helping to execute the mandate of the government and the auditing committee that we’re reviewing. It doesn’t necessarily need to be a government ABC.

**The Chair:** That’s right. Per the Auditor General’s explanation this morning, our reach is broad, members, so please feel free to exercise it accordingly in our capacity on this committee. I think that was what we heard this morning from Mr. Wylie.

I have Mr. Feehan. Do I have anyone on this side right now that I may not have seen? No? Okay.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you. I appreciate the five items that you brought up, and I’m quite happy to support them. I just want to early on put in a quick note around the fact that there are some auditing changes in terms of reporting that have been introduced to us by Mr. Wylie. I wouldn’t mind if we took some time to make sure that we saw what those changes looked like before we ever got to something as important as estimates so that we can look at the process, so that we can look at year-over-year comparisons if we’re no longer going to be getting audited reports for individual ministries in the same manner that we did in the past. I want to make sure that I fully understand how it will be differently reported so that I can compare year over year. I just want to put that on the list of possible conversations.

**The Chair:** That’s a good point that Member Feehan makes. We heard from the Auditor General this morning that some of that work will be done by fall, so potentially that work can either fall within the September or October outside-of-session meetings or potentially we can consider, when we consider the schedule further on July 2, an additional meeting. I think we can leave that door open at that point to consider how we are briefed and how we can best understand those changes. Mid-September to mid-October is sort of the window, I think, for outside of session if we are to schedule an additional meeting.

Mr. Deputy Chair.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A question for the Auditor General. You had referenced the change in accounting practices, which we could, perhaps, be better informed on through a TBF, or Treasury Board and Finance, committee. Would your sense be that they would be ready to give us an overview of those changes? I’m thinking that we may not have a large amount of business on the July 2 meeting, and I’m wondering if it might be possible or advisable for us to at least get an overview of those changes to take us into the fall session.

**Mr. Wylie:** I would suggest that you reach out to them. Right now everyone is in the middle of the financial statement wrap-up and actually preparing the consolidated financial statements that are going to be released at the end of June, so I’m not too sure about their availability. I don’t want to speak for them.

9:25

**Mr. Gotfried:** It might be premature, then. Okay. It was just a thought, if we can accelerate this process of bringing this committee up to speed, but your point is well taken. Maybe the chair and I through the subcommittee can reach out and see if that is an advisable timing for us.

**The Chair:** If not, then we can consider that matter in September, I think.

Okay. We have before us a report of the subcommittee on committee business – we have a subcommittee on the committee – and the recommendations contained therein. We have a possible motion here that we approve the report of the subcommittee on committee business and the recommendations contained therein regarding Public Accounts meeting scheduling and the time allotment for the question-and-answer portion of the Public Accounts Committee meetings.

Members, do we have any further discussion? I’m looking over here in terms of folks who have not had a chance to speak yet.

**Mr. Dach:** I have one quick question. I know committee members who have been on the committee for a while may wish to consider this. I know that it had been a practice in the past, when nearing the end of the final rotation, when time was getting short, to allow questions to be read into the record for a written answer later. I’m wondering if that’s a practice that this committee will continue as part of the final rotation. It’s not part of the agreed time allotment right now, but I know that it has been a past practice to allow a question to be read into the record for a written response later should time become short and members still had outstanding questions they wished to have answers to.

**The Chair:** Seeing some nodding heads on that, perhaps what we could do, colleagues, is amend the portion that is shaded yellow in our packages to essentially put: other business/questions for written response/closing remarks.

I have a motion to amend the time allotment portion that is being moved by Member Turton. Is that correct?

**Mr. Turton:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. Do I have a volunteer? And do I have a seconder on that? I have Member Toor. So then we will simply amend the time allotment piece if it’s the will of the floor. Good. All right.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Just a quick question. A question perhaps to the clerk, Madam Chair. Typically that’s just been a two- or three-minute sort of schedule at the end, Member Dach. Do we have time to squeeze that in perhaps as a three-minute rotation at the end? Do you believe we can squeeze that into this time schedule? I know it’s tight; it depends on whether we’re expedient and efficient, the triple-E committee here. Would that be worth putting in there as a firm kind of fourth rotation?

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk.

**Mrs. Sawchuk:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In the past the committee, as the Deputy Chair has referenced, has kind of played it by ear. In some cases the member hasn’t used all of the time allotment within their timing, and those minutes are held to the end, and basically then it’s negotiating to see how much time is left towards the very end after the last full rotation, and then the time is divvied up equally. That’s how it’s been done in the past.

**The Chair:** I have Member Hoffman.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Chair and Deputy Chair, for the recommendation. I personally think that there may be times when we don’t have any questions left, so having a specific time allocation for three minutes that we may not use may not be necessary. I prefer that we leave the motion as originally moved but that if we hit a point where it becomes problematic, we

always reserve the right to come back and revisit our scheduling for future meetings. That would be my recommendation.

**The Chair:** Member Turton.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess from a process perspective I would prefer to have it actually as a set time, and then if we choose not to use it, we can take it from that point versus just saying: oh, we have some extra time; let's fit this in. I really want to make sure that in every meeting we have the ability to be able to add those questions as a set part of the process. If it doesn't get used, it doesn't get used, but at least we're not trying to fit it in at some meeting if it's a jam-packed schedule. It's actually allocated towards that, and that way we can make sure that those additional questions are addressed.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. Members, we have an amendment, then, to the amendment. I don't know how we might frame it – questions for a written response portion? – and how that would be allocated. Three minutes each side, and then four minutes for other business/closing remarks? I'm fine with that. Members do also have the opportunity to submit written questions through the Legislature and Motions for Returns as well, right?

Member Dach.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Chair. I'm comfortable proceeding with the amended motion with the motion and the amended time allotment. I do know that in the past as deputy chair it has been a bit of a race to complete the final proceedings of the Legislature, so I do think the clerk's interjections should be considered, and we will perhaps see how it operates, and if indeed we're finding that we're having trouble finishing the meeting in time to depart for the House, I think we might want to look at adjusting it accordingly. But I'm fine to proceed as we are right now.

**The Chair:** Member Hoffman.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you. I think that the motion needs to have time allocation of three minutes for government caucus members and three minutes for Official Opposition caucus members.

**Mr. Gotfried:** As a fourth rotation.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Ms Hoffman:** If that's the wording that's being worked on.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Let's try it.

**Mr. Feehan:** I notice that the time allocated on our chart here is 80 minutes of a 90-minute meeting. Do we always leave 10 minutes just for variation, or can it just be added on to the chart as it is here without taking away the 10-minute other business?

**The Chair:** According to the clerk, who is the knower of things, it is to accommodate our ability to scurry off to the Chamber in time. It gives us 10 minutes of brisk walking, Member Feehan, to get your steps in so that we can get to the Legislature.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. Member Rosin.

**Ms Rosin:** Okay. Just to confirm, looking at this, each rotation, I assume, is a different ministry or agency or board? I don't know. Obviously, I've never done this before, but is 10 minutes on each one enough time to really get our teeth into it? I don't know if there's a proposed solution for that.

**The Chair:** No. Just to clarify, hon. member, we will have, let's say, for example, Transportation here, and then any of their associated entities. Their deputy will come and sit where the AG is, maybe some associated ADMs, other officials in the little gallery there, and we will ask questions on a rotation of that specific ministry and/or associated entity.

**Ms Rosin:** Okay. So each full meeting gets three rotations of each.

**The Chair:** That's right.

**Ms Rosin:** Okay. Perfect.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Yeah. It's fast.

**Mr. Stephan:** I guess my concern would be that even with the three rotations, that may not leave us enough time to get through the pertinent questions that we would have. I'm just wondering in the past how that's been dealt with, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Do you want me to . . .

**The Chair:** Please. Yes.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Having been a member of the committee, this is very fast and furious. You have to be very well organized in your sets of questions. You have to be prepared to ask for one of our guests to possibly provide you data or a response in writing if it's something more detailed. It is a bit of speed dating going on here. You have to be fast. You have to be efficient. These rotations basically dictate that.

With that fourth rotation, we have the three minutes at the end. If you have questions that you don't get to, you have a chance to read them very quickly into the record, and then the ministry or ABC that is in front of us will have to respond in writing to that. So it gives you that opportunity to fit in some of those things that you would have liked to have gotten to but didn't get to. It is very highly efficient.

9:35

I think, as was referenced by the Auditor General, the spirit of this committee is nonpartisan. If there is a line of questioning that we all want to have answers on, we have the ability to work together to drill down to get the answers to those questions by flipping those back and forth from the two sides – we don't have to sit in two sides – of the table here, because this information is important to us and important to Albertans. I think the spirit of the nonpartisan nature of this committee is such that – there will be times where I'm sure that that will not always work perfectly, but when it does work well, it feels good and it is very effective for us in doing the work on behalf of Albertans.

**Mr. Stephan:** Thank you, Vice-chair, for that clarification.

The change, then, that we made to the time allotment is really good for having that fourth rotation. It allows, then, to read in those questions and get those written responses if we are limited from a time perspective.

Thank you.

**Mr. Gotfried:** And have your fastest reader do those at the end.

**Mr. Stephan:** Yes. Put on your auctioneer voice. Thank you.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Yes. Exactly. We'll have tryouts for that last rotation.

**The Chair:** Let's try not to torture *Hansard* too much.

So, friends, we have amended the motion, but we need someone to move this motion now. I have Member Walker for Sherwood Park moving the main motion. Do I have a seconder on the main motion? Member Feehan. We don't need a seconder? Okay. Good. So I am going to read this motion into the record such that we might vote on it. It's moved by Member Walker for Sherwood Park that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the reports of the subcommittee on committee business and the recommendations contained therein regarding committee meeting scheduling and time allotment for the question and answer portion of the committee meetings, with the time allotment chart being amended to include a fourth rotation to identify three minutes each for the Official Opposition and for government members to read outstanding questions into the record.

That is the motion as moved. Is there any further discussion, members? Seeing none, I will now call for all in favour. Any opposed?

The motion is now passed.

Under other business we just have one matter of sort of housekeeping. The committee had directed the LAO, the Leg. Assembly Office, to look into the option of video conferencing for committee meetings at its June 4 meeting. As committee members are aware, our committee facilities make significant use of technology for the conduct of our meetings, including recording

and transcribing of proceedings and high-quality streaming and broadcasting capabilities. Since moving into this building four years ago, the Leg. Assembly Office has been successfully integrating and expanding the various technology capabilities of these facilities.

Members have expressed an interest in using Skype or other video conferencing technology to participate in committee meetings. The LAO is working on these options to incorporate this possibility. They do not currently have the facilities necessary to integrate any video conferencing in with the professional level of broadcasting that, certainly, the public has come to expect and enjoy. Let's give them a little bit more time to do that. They will continue to review their options, and they will report to us when they have something to report on this matter. I would just like to thank them for looking into it, and thank them for their ongoing commitment to ensuring that Albertans have access to the proceedings of the Legislature.

With that, we will establish the date of our next meeting, colleagues, as Tuesday, June 18, with the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation. I believe, Clerk, that those proceedings are not on *Hansard* because they are simply a matter of briefing and background and orientation for members.

With that, then, would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? I have a mover from Member Renaud. All in favour? Any opposed? And the motion is carried.

Thank you very much, everyone. Have a wonderful morning.

[The committee adjourned at 9:39 a.m.]



