



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Friday, October 2, 2020
9 a.m.

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[Ms Phillips in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us on this beautiful fall day here in Alberta, all across the province. I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West.

Ordinarily I would suggest that we go around the room and introduce ourselves; however, given the many different ways that people are joining this meeting today, I'm going to ask Aaron Roth to simply note for the record everyone who is in attendance.

Mr. Roth: Thank you, Chair. I have Member Rowswell. I have Member Dach, Member Renaud, Member Gotfried, Member Reid, Member Phillips, Member Stephan. There are also three others on the telephone, and I'm not sure who they are. If they could identify themselves, please.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt here.

Mr. Roth: Two others on the telephone?

Ms Rosin: Miranda Rosin.

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie.

Mr. Roth: And also, Chair, from the Auditor General's office: Karen Zoltenko, Pam Appelman, and Val Mellesmoen. I believe that's it.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you. We have folks in the room as well, so I'll let you finish with that.

Mr. Roth: Thank you, Chair. From the LAO is Dr. Phil Massolin, and also Nancy Robert is on the phone from research services.

The Chair: Very good.

We have a few housekeeping items then as we turn to the business at hand. I would ask all members who are participating via video conference and teleconference to ensure your microphones are muted, as usual, unless you are recognized to speak. When you unmute your microphone, please wait a second or two so that the audio captures what you're saying. If you wish to abstain from a recorded vote, please send the committee clerk a private instant message, e-mail, or text.

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One additional note. If there is a point of order, as per previous practice you do not need to be recognized to speak; just simply speak because that seems to be the best way to handle that in this mixed-media way of handling Public Accounts.

We'll now move on to item 2, which is the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda?

Seeing none, would a member like to move that the agenda for the October 2, 2020, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed right now as we have it before us?

Mr. Gotfried: So moved.

Mr. Dach: Dach.

The Chair: I think we have a mover from either Gotfried or Dach, is what I heard. Is there any discussion on this motion? Before the committee votes, I will ask all members to unmute their microphones. Who is all in favour? Any members opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried. Please remute.

We'll now move on to approval of the minutes. We have minutes from our last meeting. Do members have any errors or omissions to note in regard to the meeting minutes? If not, would a member move that the minutes of the July 14, 2020, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed?

Mr. Dach: Dach.

The Chair: Moved by Dach. Is there any discussion on this motion? All in favour? Are there any opposed? Very good. That motion is carried. Thank you, members.

We'll now move on. This is a business meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, so we are going to now consider the fall 2020 schedule of committee meetings. The subcommittee met on September 28 to discuss this proposed schedule for our fall sitting. This draft has been posted to the committee's internal website for all members to consider. I would like to open the floor to a discussion about the schedule and invite any comments or motions related to this matter of business.

Seeing no preliminary discussion, we could put a possible motion on the floor, then, and we will put it up on the screen in the room. I don't know if there are any members in the room. No, there are not. Okay. I will read out the possible motion then for all members' consideration, that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts adopt the draft schedule for the fall 2020 sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature as recommended by the subcommittee on committee business.

Is there any discussion on this motion? We need a mover, I guess, first.

Mr. Reid: So moved.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Member Reid.

We will now have discussion on this motion proper.

All right. Well, seeing none, if all members can unmute their microphones. All in favour? Any members opposed? Thank you.

That motion is carried.

We will now open the floor to a discussion about future planning of committee meetings. Previously the Public Accounts Committee authorized the subcommittee on committee business to make alterations to the schedule as may be required. As we're still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, is this the practice that the committee wishes to continue? I'm seeing broad nods. I'll take that as a discussion. I propose a possible motion. I'll read it out, and then someone can move it if the committee is amenable or if one member of the committee, I suppose, is amenable, that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts authorize the subcommittee on committee business after consulting with committee members to amend the schedule of committee meetings for the fall sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature.

Is there any discussion on the motion? First, we need a mover.

Mr. Rowswell: I'll move.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member Rowswell.

Is there any discussion on the motion as moved?

Mr. Dach: Just a quick question, Chair. What form of discussion will take place with committee members prior to formalization of changes?

The Chair: Yeah. You know, I think that essentially it's providing the committee members with a context if there's a change such as department scheduling, that sort of thing. That was kind of how we dealt with it in the spring. They're not substantive reasons for changes necessarily so much as just simple scheduling due to the unforeseen circumstances. I think that's really, from my perspective, what it would be. It's just a touch base back with the committee to say: okay; well, we need to move this department for this one, hearing from the clerk that the department is not ready or whatever the case may be.

Mr. Dach: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chair, I think that the conversations we had were really about extraordinary circumstances, not just a normal course of business. Expectation will be that ministries will show up as scheduled, but we are moving into unknown territory again in the fall around the pandemic, and I think it was really just put in place to address that.

I think we have pretty round agreement at the subcommittee level, but if there's feeling that we need to seek the support of the full committee on this, we'll certainly take that option as well. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you for that.

I do believe we have a motion on the floor that has been moved by Member Rowswell, that possible motion. Is there any further discussion on the motion?

Seeing none, we will move to a vote. If members could unmute. All in favour? Any opposed?

That motion is carried.

Please remute your microphones.

Now we will move and look ahead to the spring sitting. We would welcome some discussion and direction about the process of planning future meetings of the committee and the role members might like to see the subcommittee play in establishing the schedule. A possible motion is that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts authorize the subcommittee after consulting with committee members . . .

so our individual caucuses

. . . to develop a schedule of committee meetings and invite various ministries and other relevant entities to appear before the committee for the spring sitting of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature.

We would need a mover for this motion. I don't know if anyone needs me to reread it or circulate it. That one was a little bit more complex.

9:10

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chair, I might have missed something in there, but the idea is that we will bring forward a schedule for approval by the committee. Is that wording in there? Did I just miss it?

The Chair: Yeah. This committee is authorizing our committee after consulting with committee members to develop that schedule. It's essentially saying to the subcommittee, Richard, that you and I develop a schedule for the spring sitting of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. With the approval being just a matter of course. Thank you.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Rowswell: So moved if we need a mover.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any discussion on this motion?

Mr. Roth: Hi. Excuse me, Chair. Sorry. I was just having a brief discussion. I'm just wondering about the wording of the possible motion, just before it's officially moved. Rather than saying, "for the spring sitting of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature," perhaps say, "for the next sitting in 2021," for instance.

The Chair: Yeah. That's right.

Mr. Roth: For the spring sitting in 2021?

The Chair: Yeah. That's more precise wording, depending on the status of the various sittings and sessions, right? Yeah. Absolutely. I think that would be considered friendly because it means the same thing; it's just more precise language.

Is there any discussion on whether that is a friendly change? I just want to open that up.

Mr. Rowswell: It is, I think. Yeah.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Rowswell.

Mr. Dach: I agree: friendly.

Mr. Gotfried: Agreed.

The Chair: I think we can move to a vote then. All in favour of this motion as edited, not amended, in a friendly fashion that is before the members now? All right. Are there any opposed? Seeing none, that motion is carried.

Now if you could remute, we will move on to the Westminster Workshop on Public Financial Oversight item on our agenda. An invitation has been extended to us to participate in the Westminster Workshop on Public Financial Oversight from October 19 to 23. The committee has been invited to fill six spots for the virtual conference. The deputy chair and I have suggested that Dr. Massolin and the committee clerk be afforded the opportunity to participate, and the deputy chair, Mr. Schmidt, and I have also agreed to participate. Member Dach has indicated a desire to participate as well.

The committee clerk sent out information about the workshop earlier this week. The agenda for the workshop should be available shortly. If there is any discussion on this, I'm happy to entertain it. Certainly, the idea was that if we had two spots, two spots, two spots, that would be fine, but if there is an additional spot, then it's just sort of first-come, first-served. Right now as proposed it is Gotfried, Schmidt, Phillips, Dr. Massolin, and Aaron Roth, and Member Dach if there is no additional member from the government side.

Mr. Gotfried: I would just ask that if there's any other interest, to please bring that forward at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: Good. Well, certainly, any materials or anything like that that we learn, we will bring back to our respective caucuses as well. I think that that will probably be a very good exercise.

Moving on to the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors conferences. We had the annual conference on September 10, 2020, virtually. The deputy chair and I as well as Dr. Massolin and the committee clerk took part in the conference.

The committee chair for this annual conference rotates to Alberta this year, so I am the chair of the CCPAC, and Dr. Massolin is the

executive director of the organization for the year. Last year it was B.C., the year before that Ontario, and so on. It is up to Alberta to begin to plan the 2021 conference, hosted here by our committee and the Auditor General.

I'll just keep providing some updates on this process to the committee. We have a working group of staff that's been established by the LAO and by the AG's office. The Matrix Hotel has been booked for in-person guests. The plan at present is to hold in-person meetings in the Edmonton Federal Building, but – who knows? – there's a possibility of holding a hybrid meeting of some sort so that we have a mix of in-person and virtual. We may have to look, depending on the decision-making process, at alternate locations, other options. We'll provide you more information as the situation evolves.

The final piece that I will say is that this conference is very interesting. I learned a lot at the Ontario one, even at the virtual one, listening to what other public accounts committees are doing across the country and some insights from the United Kingdom as well, so it's worth our time as legislators. I hope that we can have at least some kind of hybrid and meet together next summer. Generally speaking, it is held in August.

We'll now move on to other business. Before opening the floor, I have one other item from the subcommittee on committee business to raise with you folks. Due to the time constraints for the meetings of the committee for at least the first part of the fall session, the deputy chair and I have agreed to a more compressed

schedule for the premeeting briefings and posting of documents for the first few meetings of the committee. This means that the committee clerk will provide members with information on the premeeting briefings shortly and documents posted for committee members as they become available. So we might not have those premeeting briefings a full – I think it was eight days or nine days prior to the Public Accounts meeting. They might be the day before or a couple of days before – is essentially the upshot of that. It's simply because we start on October 27, just in terms of meeting the deadlines for all of the various staff.

Is there any other business that any members would like to bring forward at this time? Seeing none.

Based on our decisions today, the next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, October 27, with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Would a member like to move that the October 2 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be adjourned?

Mr. Dach: Dach.

The Chair: A motion by Dach. All in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Enjoy a beautiful, sunny day across most of the province, everyone, and we will see you very soon.

[The committee adjourned at 9:19 a.m.]

