

7:47 a.m.

Tuesday, November 9, 1993

[Chairman: Mr. Day]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to another morning in paradise. We'll call the meeting to order, and we'll look for approval of the agenda. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Approval of the committee meeting minutes. Any discussion arising? Would someone move to approve the minutes as distributed. Halvar, thank you.

We'll move right away, then, to discussion. I understand we've got agreement that we'll go till about 25 after this morning. We have our December 1 date out there ahead of us, but with all the time we have on our hands, I know we'll be having many meetings before then to be able to do whatever we have to do. So I would invite any opening comments in terms of discussion regarding the role and mandate. Yes, Grant.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Chairman, I have a letter that I've addressed to you, and I have copies for every member of the committee, outlining some liberal suggestions . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Is that a big L or a little L?

MR. MITCHELL: Little L, of course, and big L too.

. . . for PAC changes which we thought might provide a basis for discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll have everybody take a few moments to look at that letter. Is that acceptable to you?

If you've all had the opportunity to read it through, we would note that this submission has been received. What I'd suggest, then, without getting into a minute discussion on each point: there may be questions for clarification purposes, if we could do that first before we get into the discussion. Before we do that, are there general comments people would like to make at this point about Public Accounts? Then, Grant, we'll receive this information as the guideline for discussion on specific points. At that point, if people have questions for clarification of any of the points, and then we'd get into the narrower discussions.

First, any opening comments on Public Accounts itself that anybody wants to make? I've got Halvar.

MR. JONSON: We'll be discussing the paper put forward by Mr. Mitchell momentarily, but first of all, I get a kick out of item (g). I sat on Public Accounts for 10 years, and I don't recall ever going on a trip anywhere. It was one of the most dedicated committees to the Legislature that has ever existed. I do acknowledge, however, that the chairman and vice-chairman occasionally went, I think once a year, to that national conference on public accounts.

I'd just like to make a general comment, and that is that quite often you don't utilize the rules and opportunities that are there. I think we should keep in mind that quite a bit more penetrating questioning and discussion could go on in Public Accounts, in my view. I shouldn't be critical of public accounts committees of the past or their members, but it is my observation that with a bit more research and an effort to really zero in on the departments as they come before us, we could be much more effective as a Public Accounts Committee, and I think that has as much to do with making the committee effective as changing the rules. I'm not at

all against discussing changing the rules and the parameters for Public Accounts, but I think we should keep that particular thing in mind. Quite often the time at Public Accounts was taken up with very general questions and discussion about overall government direction – and there are many other venues for that to be discussed – instead of getting in on the specifics and the actual nature of expenditures over the past months. So I'd make that comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.  
Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I too think that the Public Accounts could be more effective. I've sat on Public Accounts for quite some time, although I'm not a member now, and I think we could be more specific in our approach to review the various departments and make certain they have achieved the goals that were established. I've always felt that this account deals in a historical way with what we have done. Quite often we found ourselves questioning ministers that weren't there at the time that either the expense was incurred or the budget was formed, resulting in the document we're reading. So I've always felt there was a redundancy about the committee, and perhaps we could address that. In quick review of this – and I don't want to get into the discussion of this document – when I look at some of the suggestions, reviewing fees and honoraria in item (b), I don't see the role of the committee changing in that direction. We already have committees set up for some of these things, and the last thing we want to do is start duplicating what we're already doing.

Those are my general comments, Mr. Chairman, but we can get into discussion of this document later.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So still under general observations, Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Well, I don't want to sound facetious about this; I'm being very honest. I have the dubious distinction of being the vice-chairman of that committee right now, and being fairly new in all of this, my observation is that it is very little more than an extension of the existing question period. This is not intended to be negative, but I think the general purpose in most of the questions by the opposition members has been to try and embarrass the minister a little bit. I realize that is probably a part of the function of partisan politics, and I really have to question some of the value of this entire committee. If there was some way of legitimately making it effective, I have no problems considering it. That is my honest and candid opinion right now.

7:57

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's what we're all about, honesty and candidness.

MR. MITCHELL: I certainly appreciate the sense of frustration that I'm hearing between the lines and maybe explicitly in the comments of the members already. I think, if there is ever a consensus out of a subcommittee of the Legislature, it will be on the fact that the Public Accounts Committee is an extremely frustrating mechanism at this time for everybody.

Having said that, I think we also have to agree that the Public Accounts Committee is a fundamentally important part of the legislative process. The Legislature plays a very – obviously, one of its most important roles is budget review, and it's as important for postexpenditure, to have a postexpenditure review undertaken by the Legislature. Now, we don't dedicate 25 days of the

legislative session to postexpenditure review. That responsibility and task has been undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee. I think we have to agree that that is a very important function, and what we have to do is find ways to make it work effectively. It's essential to effective management that managers know that they're going to be questioned after the fact: did they or did they not meet their objectives? I think that in the legislative process there's a tremendous advantage because we can bring that out in a public way, and it really strengthens that process.

Having said that, we've listed a number of ideas here that we think improve the process, and I'd just like to highlight a couple of them. One is that up to this time, since I've been in the Legislature – and for many of those years I've actually sat on the Public Accounts Committee – we've never reviewed the expenditures of all the departments. It seems to me that that's a pretty serious omission. Part of the reason has been that we have been limited to sitting only while the Legislature sits. Other committees sit when the Legislature doesn't sit. There's no real logic or justification for why the Public Accounts Committee couldn't sit between Legislature sessions. In fact, some committees almost sit only when the Legislature doesn't sit; for example, the Members' Services Committee.

We are concerned that that could be construed as a budget increase because of fees to MLAs. We are saying that that should certainly be reviewed. We don't want to increase the expenditure of this committee by proposing that it meet more often. We think the committee should be broader, that it shouldn't just review department by department, but that there are some times when a special issue arises that needs to have attention. NovAtel would be a classic example that could have been reviewed by not only the Auditor General but by a committee of this nature. It's hard to imagine, in fact, that a committee of this nature wouldn't be structured to look into an issue of that scope and that breadth. We believe you need to have more detailed reports, simply so there's a basis upon which the Legislature can debate. We believe that just as we debated our motion from this committee yesterday, we should be able to debate a motion that says that the Legislature will concur in the report from the Public Accounts Committee.

One idea that isn't in here but for which we have set a precedent through the subcommittee, the report of the subcommittee structure for budget review, and which maybe addresses Gary's concern in particular, is that we negotiated to have those meetings outside of the Legislative Assembly room and in this room. At least, the one that I was on was in this room. I don't know how the government members or the minister found it, but I found that to be a much, much more conducive atmosphere for detailed debate. It was less structured, it was less formal, it was less confrontational and contentious, and it allowed us to get into some very productive, detailed questioning, which I think worked extremely well. It might be that we should consider a different venue for the Public Accounts Committee. This room offers I think the process something that the more structured and formal Legislative Assembly room doesn't offer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; with those general observations, before we get into any in-depth analysis on a point-by-point basis, are there any questions people want clarification on? This wouldn't be for debate, but before we get to that. As you've read through, anything you'd like clarified from the list that's in front of you?  
Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Yes, I'd like a clarification on (i). Is this the current quarterly budget statements?

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah.

MRS. LAING: You're moving it out of the postexpenditure, then, into the current?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, no, not exactly. These would be quicker postexpenditure reviews, Bonnie, instead of waiting the full budget year and then as much as six months after the end of the budget year. The Public Accounts Committee started to meet I guess in September this year, but normally it wouldn't start to meet until October or November if there's a fall session even, and if there isn't a fall – well, there will be now, but in the past there haven't been fall sessions, so we'd wait as much as a year almost, until after the end of the previous fiscal year, before any review was ever given. Well, if you're trying to run a company, you certainly wouldn't wait over a year. In fact, it could be 21 months after the first quarter of the year in which the expenditures were made before we would sit down and review those expenditures. You'd never let your manager of your company wait for 21 months before you'd sit down and review the expenditures to see whether they were on or not. So at the end of the first quarter, when the Treasurer brought in the quarterly budget review, the Public Accounts Committee would sit down and review that quarterly budget review, right now, and that's postexpenditure.

MR. DUNFORD: Grant, we don't let the competition run our company.

MR. MITCHELL: That's interesting because I thought that the spirit of co-operation in the Legislature was that in fact we're not competition. In fact, in companies, for example, you have people who disagree. You have a finance chairman and an operations chairman or vice-president who often disagree, but would they be competition? A sales VP would be competition? For sure.

MR. DUNFORD: Anytime you want to come and join us, you're welcome.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, Clint, that's interesting. Of course, this structure wouldn't be here to operate in this way if institutions like this hadn't operated successfully for literally hundreds of years. So I think we can't undermine the role of this committee and of the opposition that wants to get the information.

MR. DUNFORD: I'm not calling for its abolition, but there is some pretty dramatic change here I see in this piece of paper. You know, we're talking about a whole new . . .

MR. MITCHELL: You Conservatives aren't afraid of change, are you?

MR. BRUSEKER: That's exactly what's needed is a whole bunch of change.

MR. MITCHELL: Exactly. It's not working the way it's going.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Other questions for clarification?

If I could just ask out of my naiveté, not ever having had the rare privilege of sitting on that committee and always clamouring for it, just on the NovAtel question, were there not questions, discussions from Public Accounts around NovAtel or directed towards that minister at various times?

MR. MITCHELL: I wasn't sitting on the committee during that period of time, but whatever could be done, it would be argued that the one time the minister responsible was there, the Treasurer in this case probably, for two hours certainly wouldn't constitute the kind of in-depth and detailed committee review that is undertaken by committees of this nature elsewhere, certainly in Ottawa. The changes that allowed the committee in Ottawa to do it were in fact brought in by the Conservative government.

MR. BRUSEKER: Certainly there were some questions towards that minister at the time, but there were also motions that were put forward on at least, I think, two occasions that requested an additional in-depth review to be undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee, both of which were turned down.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Under the structure that we have now, with the four-hour session being allowed at the request of the subcommittee and again calling someone back again if you want them to redo it, would that type of structure now in place satisfy the type of requirement, do you think?

MR. MITCHELL: No, because if you're referring to the subcommittee on the budget review process, the chairmen are very careful, and rightly so, to limit that debate to the budget, not to last year's budget particularly, but to the budget. In fact, we were very specifically limited to program-by-program discussion.

MR. BRUSEKER: But you're suggesting that a parallel structure could be set up for the Public Accounts Committee. Is that what you're saying?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I was just tossing that out from the point of view of the question.  
Bonnie.

8:07

MRS. LAING: The Auditor General was questioned on the NovAtel issue, and it was felt that he had absolutely investigated each and every aspect of it and that we were satisfied with his report.

MR. BRUSEKER: Some were satisfied.

MRS. LAING: That was the general consensus of the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I gather there was some dissenting opinion.

MR. BRUSEKER: There was definitely a dissenting opinion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Bonnie. That's helpful information.  
Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I certainly agree that there's a need for a review of the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee. I think that goes without saying, because as it exists now, it's frustrating almost everyone. However, what is being outlined in this suggestion is changing the committee so dramatically that if they are going to review every detail of what is done, I can see this committee sitting almost every week. Just the review of NovAtel alone is a very complex, very involved issue. For this committee to plow through the same work that we have hired an Auditor General to do seems to me to be a ridiculous exercise and a waste of time.

I don't question the fact that we should challenge the Auditor General and his report, but to go all over the issue itself again? In (e) it talks about broadening the scope of Public Accounts and reviewing "not only specific departmental expenditures, but other issues, related to Public Accounts" as they come up. For heaven's sake, as we walk through this document, almost every item expands the scope of the public accounts to the point where we are duplicating one area or another almost every step of the way. The "full review of fees and other honoraria for MLAs" is already being looked after by Members' Services.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Chairman, Roy is just misunderstanding that. We're not saying that the Public Accounts Committee would do that. We're saying that to the extent the Public Accounts Committee would pay fees to MLAs for meetings outside of the legislative session, that should be reviewed. That's all we're saying.

MR. BRASSARD: I'm sorry. I misunderstood that then.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't know the format the chairman wants to undertake. We're just still at the general discussion, I guess. If you want to go through these point by point and discuss and moderate them and move on them, we'd be happy to do that. These are discussion points; they're not a package. Many of them are independent.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, then to sum up, I would say that we really should start with (c), just deciding what the mandate of this committee is and should be before we get into some of these others.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Again, before getting into specific ones. Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Okay; this is just a general comment. My opening comment referred to this thing as being sort of a mini question period. I'm wondering how much we actually accomplish by asking each minister or the ministers that are available questions for a short period of time. I'm going to be careful how I say this. Would it be possibly more effective if the Public Accounts Committee basically dealt only with the Auditor General and went through his report, discussed items with him? If certain clarification was required, maybe some kind of written requests could be made to the ministers or to their offices for some more clarification, rather than the exercise we're going through now. I'm saying that, not having considered all the implications, being fairly new to all of this, and wondering if a totally different style might be better.

MR. MITCHELL: You're asking me?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Grant, if I could just say that for the purpose of a really open discussion and so we can allow this type of question, I hope none of us blue-skies, if I can use that, throws a suggestion out. We're looking at no sacred cows. We can talk about anything. Everything's in *Hansard*, but the tone of how we say things isn't. I wouldn't want someone rushing out and saying, "Peace River MLA says scrap committee; just let Auditor General do it." We're having a good, open discussion. Let's not be afraid to put any idea on the table, but recognize the spirit in which it's given.

MR. MITCHELL: For sure. Yeah. I really appreciate that.

Gary, we believe that the Auditor General needs to play a bigger role in the Public Accounts Committee. In fact, point (j) in my letter outlines the model that's used in Ottawa, where the Auditor General meets with the committee on a Tuesday prior to the Thursday meeting with a given minister. If you took away the committee's meetings with ministers, I would argue that you really gut its effectiveness. I mean, ministers need to be brought before private members of this Legislature to be held accountable for what they did before. If you just talk to the Auditor General about it, they're not held accountable. That's like talking to the finance VP of your company because you want to hold the operations VP accountable. It just wouldn't work.

MR. FRIEDEL: I guess the point I was making, though, is that it happens in question period anyway, if you specifically want to ask the minister the question.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, question period, as you know, is a maximum in our Legislature of 15 questions a day from a wide range of issues.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Rarely.

MR. MITCHELL: Rarely. I mean, 14 some days. It's 50 minutes a day. That would be like saying that we don't need to do a budget review. You know, we don't need the 25 days of estimates debate because we have question period. Well, it's just not the case. It's quite a different function for both of those. Public Accounts and question period both have traditional places in the legislative, parliamentary process that's worked for literally hundreds of years.

MR. JONSON: But I think the point that Mr. Friedel was making – and I tend to agree – is that the nature of questions in Public Accounts are often those of question period rather than really trying to get at the heart of some financial issues within the public accounts. So I think in that sense he's got a point.

MR. MITCHELL: I agree. I don't think any of us would disagree with that. In fact, we really want to make Public Accounts work, just like we really wanted to make the subcommittees work. I haven't spoken to the ministers, particularly, who were involved in our estimates subcommittees, but I found the one I was involved in to be very, very productive. I think it was very positive. You know, we tried to ask questions that were directed not just politically but at getting information and so on. I think part of the reason for that – well, two things: one, there was a commitment to make that process work in that way. I see a commitment here to make this process work better, that the opposition wanted to make it work better, as did government members and ministers. And we had a different environment. We worked in this room, you know, where it's not as confrontational. It's not as formal and as structured. You look people in the eye here, and you deal with them in a more human way. I think it worked extremely effectively. That would be a proposal that I would add to this list. Do it outside that Chamber.

MR. BRUSEKER: I've been on the Public Accounts Committee for four years now. One of the reasons why I've been frustrated by the committee, aside from the issue of the nature of the questions, is that regardless of the nature of the questions, for years members of the committee have been asking questions of ministers. Ministers give a response, but I don't ever feel there's any follow-up, that there's any significant change in government

policy as a result of something that may have come out. Questions that are often asked are of the nature: "Well, you overexpended here by a million dollars or underexpended by a million dollars. Tell me what happened." I never get any kind of a sense from the questions that are asked and the answers that are given by the ministers that there's ever any change in government policy.

I think one of the things I would like to see is if somehow we could change the Public Accounts Committee so that when we rise and the ministers go off and the members of the committee go off, there's some kind of a follow-up that comes out of this that says: "Gee, out of this session we learned something. We feel now we can make some changes in the management of the accounts so that for subsequent budget years we don't run into that kind of difficulty." That's what I think would be the ideal situation.

Now, obviously you're never going to be able to eliminate and solve all the problems, in anticipation of them arising, through the Public Accounts Committee. I echo the frustration of some of the other members that have been on the Public Accounts Committee, that it seems like we spend an hour and a half there, then we get up and walk out the door and there doesn't seem to be any substantial change. So I offer that as a comment too. I'm not sure whether that falls within the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee or whether that's a recommendation that needs to go to government through the report that comes out at the end of it, but I think there should be a definite correlation there.

8:17

MR. MITCHELL: I'd like to add, you know, that just because a question is asked that embarrasses the government or an answer is given that embarrasses the opposition doesn't mean those weren't effective questions or effective answers. That is part of this process, and it's a tradition in this process which has served countries like Canada extremely well for a long time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can I ask, just from the point of not having been there – in much of this, because of the time the public accounts comes out, you're obviously dealing with after the fact, postexpenditure. There must be a lot of times when you're dealing with a minister who wasn't actually there at the time.

MR. BRUSEKER: For example, this Legislature right now. I don't know that there are any ministers I can think of that occupy the same portfolio they were in a year ago. So we've got a whole new slate. Even though some of the members of cabinet were members of cabinet before, they now hold different portfolios. So there's a brand-new slate right across the board, and that happens very frequently. I think in part that's probably part of the reason – again going back to the NovAtel issue, an important issue. The individual who was the minister for technology, research and telecommunications of course is no longer a member of cabinet, so it does make it more difficult to try and get good answers on what happened. I mean, the words "account" and "accountability" are really key issues in the whole process, and it's difficult to have accountability when you cannot ask the minister who was there. I guess when we're talking financial accountability, and there's a section here – do we talk about calling witnesses as well? I think that's something we need to give consideration to as well. Yes, you've touched on a key point, I think.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wouldn't feel responsible if I were asked for some questionable spending that happened in the Department of Labour in '91. I could say, "Well, here's what happened, but get off my back," sort of thing.

MR. MITCHELL: There are two things I would argue in that case. One is that again parliamentary tradition accommodates or accounts for that problem. The minister who is currently in place is responsible for everything that's ever gone on. Secondly, if it's a new minister, all the more reason why that new minister should be questioned by a committee of this nature: to make sure that minister is briefed and is up to date on what's gone on previously. Thirdly, it's very interesting to note that in Ottawa they don't even meet with ministers. The committee meets with senior officials, and of course because there are more of them, while some will come and some will go, there tends to be greater continuity. So you find the questioning therefore can have effect in that regard.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What would be the opposition member's response if ministers didn't come to this committee and just deputies did?

MR. MITCHELL: We'd probably be quite interested in that actually. We wouldn't rule that out by any means. That would be something we'd be interested in debating.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was on Public Accounts, too, for four years. I found that when the minister was there a lot of very interesting things happened, because you sort of picked up on their view of things, their policy, the things they believed in. I think sometimes very valuable information came out as background for a private member through just the opening remarks of the minister. We found a lot of points that you'd miss if you were just talking to a bureaucrat, because you got a different flavour, I think, from the minister. I'm thinking, for instance, when Mr. Kowalski came. He had so many different parts in his portfolio that you often weren't aware of, and that was really one of the more interesting debates, and we actually allowed him to go over to listen to . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: What debate? That wasn't a debate. We had an hour-and-a-half sermon.

MRS. LAING: It was extremely valuable information that we would not have picked up any other way. By the continuity of members remaining on the committee, the next time around you had a better idea of what actually was done in each of the different departments. I find the ministers are very helpful.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, it's good for us to get different reflections on those.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I've never sat on this, but I've never let the lack of knowledge of any topic stop me from speaking.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You fit right in then.

MR. DUNFORD: Just to pick up on Frank's account and accountability, if we're talking about accounts, then maybe the bureaucrat is fine, but if we're talking about accountability, I think it has to be the minister. I can't imagine being satisfied, if I were a member of this august committee, being content to sit and listen to a civil servant tell me how the cow ate the cabbage. I'd want to hear it from the minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. If a certain department was called, then Grant or others are saying that if the minister himself didn't

come but the full range of officials that were requested did come, there wouldn't be the hue and cry, "Where is the minister?" You'd be satisfied with what these officials will pursue.

MR. MITCHELL: Yes.

MR. BRASSARD: I think there would be times when you would want either/or.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There was one question on (b). Can we get clarification on that, Grant or others? It says "full review of fees and other honoraria for MLAs." Grant, you seemed to indicate that meant for the fees and honoraria to do with this committee, but the next paragraph talks about: "Part of this review must include an examination of the per diem fees for the PAC as well as all other committees."

MR. MITCHELL: Your point's well taken, Mr. Chairman. This is here because we want to make it clear that we don't think we should be increasing the budget of this committee. When we start to say we should therefore consider the fees of this committee, if you do that for this committee, it has implications for all committees. So we're really just flagging this issue and pointing out that the matter needs to be addressed. We're raising (a) not with a view to increasing the expenses of this committee by any means. We think this committee can do more work for the same and certainly no greater budget.

MR. BRASSARD: But you would agree that that's exactly the issue that is dealt with under Members' Services, would you not?

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, no doubt about it. But I'm not aware that Members' Services is actually going to look at that or that the Premier's task force has been called.

MR. BRUSEKER: When we were discussing the format of this letter, the point I think we were trying to make is this: the Public Accounts Committee in the past has been, I believe, hamstrung by the fact that because there were more cabinet ministers than there were meeting times, we didn't in fact meet with all the cabinet ministers, and because there was no budget, then, to meet outside of session, we simply didn't cover people and departments. For example, in the 22nd Legislature I think we only met with the Minister of Health once. It being such a large department, I really have difficulty accepting that. So we said that on one hand we want to be able to meet with more of the cabinet ministers, yet on the other hand we recognize that the Members' Services Committee and, in fact, the Public Accounts Committee agreed not to draw the \$100 per meeting honorarium, which technically we could draw but we said we don't want to do that. So we were in a quandary. On one hand we said we want to be able to meet with everybody, but on the other hand we really think we don't want to cost the government more money. I guess these two points together clearly are interlinked. We don't have an answer, and I think we attempted in points (a) and (b) simply to express that conundrum of: let's meet with everybody, but let's not cost a whole lot more money. I think that's what's being suggested here.

Yes, you're absolutely right, Roy. The review of pay is in fact under Members' Services. We're just saying that it's an issue, and it's an issue that touches the Public Accounts Committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So you're clarifying that. You don't want people rushing from here saying, "Bruseker or Mitchell wants an increase in budget."

MR. BRUSEKER: Exactly.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, that's right. We don't want an increase in budget.

MRS. LAING: Just on that point. Frank intercepted that.

One of the things I have a concern with as an MLA who lives 200 miles south of here is the travel costs. As you may be aware, last year TV, et cetera, had great fun feeding on MLAs in Calgary, and they include our travel costs. They do not say, "This is what they're paid; this is expenses." They don't treat it that way. They roll it into one, and they say, "This is what your MLA costs you." I just wonder. You know, we have to be sensitive about that. It's different if you live in Edmonton; you've got a 50-cent drive over here or whatever. But if we've got to catch an airbus or travel up here at our expense, that gets included against us, and it's used very negatively. So in a way I'm concerned about extra traveling. I mean, last year I even stayed over two or three days so I could get to meeting A and meeting C which was three days later. This takes you away from your constituency, and that is a concern to me.

8:27

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I appreciate this discussion. It's two minutes past the posted adjournment time. Can I suggest - I know certain members in the government caucus have specifics they want to bring out in terms of improvement - that any of the questioning around particular items presented here today is not saying they're not acceptable. It's a fleshing out of what the implications of this are. For our next meeting, members would come back prepared in a specific way, possibly even moving to accepting or rejecting or adding to a list of what might be acceptable. So all members will give consideration to these specifics and bring back others for an in-depth yea or nay type of discussion.

MR. BRASSARD: I'd just like to thank Grant for putting this together. Although I don't agree with some of them obviously, I do appreciate his putting them forward so we can flesh them out and use them as a focal point for our discussion.

MR. DUNFORD: He's got us working for our discussion anyway.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, that wasn't my intention, Clint. I will say that there's been some sort of intense discussion here this morning, and I want to make it clear that I accept that and welcome that. We don't want to draw lines here. I know when the Deputy Premier and I began negotiating that broad package of reforms, we went through this kind of discussion often, but we kept focused on the idea that both sides want to make this process work better. There is good faith in doing that, and perhaps nowhere is it more important than in this committee that we really come up with some positive and constructive suggestions and proposals to make it work better. That's what we want to do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Great.

On that note, a motion to adjourn. So moved by Halvar.

Thank you, folks.

[The committee adjourned at 8:29 a.m.]