

8:38 p.m.

Monday, November 29, 1993

[Chairman: Mr. Day]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll call the meeting to order. I do apologize for the six minute late start. We'll try and make that up by going six minutes over. No, we don't want to do that either. We'll just talk faster.

The agenda we've got is fairly limited, since our feeling was that we would probably be spending the majority of the time, if not all of it, discussing this one item. Do we have approval for the agenda? Roy, thank you. All in favour? Good.

Can we have a motion for approval of the minutes as distributed? Roy, thank you. All in favour? Thank you.

Any business arising from the minutes? Okay; thank you.

Well, we're into discussion of the role and the mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We have had a couple of items that were, I hope, sent to all members, one being a letter from Ron Moore on proposed changes to Public Accounts and another being Mr. Mitchell's, which was distributed at the last meeting, I believe. So I'm going to make the bold assumption that people have looked through those documents. Before we get to any specifics either arising from those two letters or any other area, does anybody want to make general statements, their view on the Public Accounts Committee?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I would. After we left the meeting the other day, I got to thinking about the whole role of Public Accounts. We've made a lot of changes this last time. We've expanded question period on a daily basis. We now have five special committees, I believe it is, and we go through an in-depth study of the department. We have the public accounts. I wonder if we even need the Public Accounts Committee at all, period. I just feel that we are expanding more and more on what we're evaluating each of these departments for on an ongoing basis, and I question the necessity for a Public Accounts Committee that at best is a review of history. So I just throw that in, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. For those members just arriving, Roy's been the first one to speak, and he's raising the question about the existence at all of this august committee.

MR. DUNFORD: He's my office mate, and I just know what a rangy-tang he is.

MR. BRASSARD: No, I'm not trying to be a rangy-tang at all. We are spending more time than ever before on where we're going. I just am not sure how much validity there is to this committee on an ongoing basis. I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I see the Public Accounts as being a reality check on: did we get where we were going? So I feel that there's merit in that committee. It's a chance to review and to learn about the departments' expenditures. Also it's a good way to learn to use those books and to read the financial statement. I see some merit in that as a learning experience, a chance to review and learn from the past.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: If we're making general comments, Mr. Chairman, I think I'm the longest living member of those present on the

Public Accounts Committee: some 11 years, as I recall all too vividly. I think somewhat along the lines that Bonnie has just mentioned. I do think, though, that Public Accounts spends a great deal of time on areas that do not need that attention. We have the Auditor General who does a very thorough review of the government accounts, and I think that the role of the Public Accounts Committee has been to review the Auditor General's report and to follow up on those areas of concern. I think that time would be much better served if the Public Accounts Committee did deal with those recommendations or those areas of concern that are in the Auditor General's report instead of, as it does from year to year, trying to go department by department and grind away. I think the time of the Public Accounts would be much shorter and much better spent by zeroing in on the areas of concern raised by the Auditor General.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Other comments, then, of a general . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Well, if I could make one just as a rookie MLA. I've not sat on the Public Accounts Committee, so I can't speak with any sort of experience. I realize that they are working on old stuff. I mean, it's history that they're reviewing and that type of thing, but I don't know. In the situation that we have down in Lethbridge and during the election, we campaigned on openness and that type of thing, and I just feel that this committee, at least as I understand its purpose and its mandate, is a necessary requirement, then, for us to be able to make the claim that we are an open government.

MR. BRUSEKER: Despite having had the opportunity to sit on this for five years – I use the word "opportunity" rather advisedly – I would not like to see this committee simply abolished. I think it does have a role to play. I think it has become bogged down in part because of the fact that we are always reviewing so far in arrears, if you will. I think that the government's move to perhaps table public accounts more quickly and more expeditiously will in itself make the committee more current in its questioning.

With respect to the idea of, as I understood the comment, dealing basically with just the Auditor General's report and not the public accounts themselves, I think that would almost be self-defeating. In past experience the Public Accounts Committee has on average spent a couple of days, as I recall, with the Auditor General discussing his report, and then we've gotten into specific departments on a day-by-day basis and thereafter. I think that if we just restrict ourselves to the Auditor General's report – I suppose that might be a positive thing – we would very quickly run out of things to question the Auditor General about, and I do think we need to question particular ministers.

One of the problems that I have seen in the past and that I anticipate we will see again in the future in questioning ministers is that because we have a brand-new cabinet this time around, many of the ministers are new to their portfolios and in fact will not have had any great knowledge about what's happened in the previous budget expenditures. From that standpoint I would like to see Public Accounts meeting with more representatives from a department than just the cabinet minister. In fact, as pointed out in Grant's letter of November 9, 1993, I think it would do us well to have more department staff rather than just the minister responding to questions.

I guess the final comment I would make is with respect to the size of the committee. It is a very large committee, and at times I find it rather tedious in its operations. I know we have to have rules for the committee to operate, and I don't know how we improve on that, but a committee of 21 – and this again is just

based on my experience in the past – means that typically what happens is that as a committee member I might get one opportunity in a one and a half hour meeting to pose a question and then two supplementary questions to a cabinet minister. So it takes me an hour and a half to get my five-minute say in, which again is not very good time management and I think in part has probably led to some of the frustration of members of the committee. From that standpoint, perhaps a smaller committee composed of people who were actively interested in public accounts, if there are such individuals, might make it a more efficient committee. I think those are the kinds of things we need to look at: making the committee more efficient.

8:48

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; that concludes general comments.

We do have two written responses here. At the risk of appearing that we're just going to react to written responses – I think that is the information that is before us – we could take a look at, in either order or natural preference, the comments and experience that have been written in by Mr. Moore as the deputy chairman of this committee previously. I don't know for how many years, but I know he served a number of years in that capacity. Seven years?

MR. JONSON: Eleven.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Eleven years?

MR. JONSON: Only seven.

MRS. DACYSHYN: I thought it was.

MR. JONSON: He was there from day one. We were elected in the same year. Gee, how time flew. I think it was more than seven, but anyway, I don't wish to correct you there.

MR. DAY: Okay. We'll be specific, and I'll say a whole pile of years. So there's some considered opinion there. Also, the reference of Grant Mitchell's, in which he again references consultation with their caucus in terms of some suggestions.

I've also heard some comments from around the table that at least one questions the existence of the committee itself just because of the many other avenues of questioning that are available and of access to information. Others seem to indicate they are somewhat comfortable with the status quo. Then we have these suggestions for specific change.

Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: By moving on, Mr. Chairman, are we . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry. Did you want to make a motion to your effect?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, I would. I'd like to know how many people feel that we need to have this committee at all.

MR. FRIEDEL: I apologize for coming late. I was over at a standing policy committee meeting, and I had to rush up to my office and get my notes for this meeting. If you don't mind, could you tell me what you were in when we started just general comments? I gather there was a comment about the value of the committee as a whole, just reading between the lines. Is that correct?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Actually, Roy Brassard opened up with general comments. He referenced the wide degree of access there

is to information and different avenues and channels and was therefore questioning the necessity for this committee at all. I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, Roy, but that's in a nutshell. We've had some other general discussion, most of which you've heard. Roy has now come back to that question: do we need this committee? He's asking who else is in support of the committee.

I don't know if you're asking that by way of a motion or you're just asking for – should we go around the table . . .

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I guess, Mr. Chairman, that we're moving on with other options. I was very serious when I made the suggestion, and I guess I was remiss in not putting it in the form of a motion. I would like to know how many people here feel that there is a need for this committee to exist.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. From the point of view of process, are you making a motion, Roy, or are you asking a general question?

MR. BRASSARD: I'll put it in the form of a motion if that will bring it to a head, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And the motion would be that you would move to find out how many people are . . .

MR. BRASSARD: I move that
the Public Accounts Committee be dissolved as being redundant.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Obviously this is a very significant motion, and I think there'll probably be some discussion on it.
Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. In general I would support that concept. I'm the vice-chairman of the existing committee; I think Frank and I are the only ones here that are on the committee. I have to suggest that there is some doubtful value of some of the time that is spent on it. I think that the first couple of meetings we had where the Auditor General was present were probably more valuable than the type of questions that were asked of the ministers. First of all, there were only, I believe, two ministers who came to the committee during the session. It was partly because of timing and lack of time, I guess, but I really doubt that we're accomplishing what is really intended. There is no general overview, because unless you are able to deal with all the departments it seems like, you know, selective questioning. We already go through the process in the general debate that goes on in the House. I think question period and Committee of Supply, where the review process is probably much more general and covers all the other areas, is already accomplishing what would be the intent of this. Questions are asked, responded to, and they are also a matter of record.

If I might make a suggestion as an alternative to meeting as the Public Accounts Committee as we are now, perhaps some time spent by this same committee or one like it going through the public accounts with the Auditor General only and maybe taking several sessions through that might be much more productive, and doing away with the component where the ministers are at, because it seems to me a duplication.

MR. GERMAIN: Okay. I'm as willing as the next person to try new things, but I would doubt that the abolition of this committee was quite what was intended when we were set up to look at reform in the area of public accounts. I would really think that a motion to abolish a long-standing, historic committee not just of

this government but of what appears to be parliamentary procedure all across Canada would be a step that we wouldn't want to take on a Monday night, even if we were just doing a straw vote.

If, as Gary says – and I've not been on this committee – there is a disfunctionality to this committee, we should work on that disfunctionality. We shouldn't abolish the committee. Whether rightly or wrongly, any of the public that care seem to feel they do not get good value for their money out of the governments, and they don't feel there's much in the way of accountability.

Now, I disagree that question period is particularly helpful, and the committee examinations of the budgets are only less so because those are budgets. The after-the-fact review is an indication of where the money was actually spent and what was done. So I wouldn't put question period and a little committee discussion in the House as particularly useful in terms of fact-finding. Now, maybe if we had freedom of information and maybe if all of the records were always brought on the table, that would be fine, but without bringing a partisan spin to this, when motions for returns of what appear to be very innocuous requests for documents are turned down without any explanation, without any real thought given as to what message or signal that sends out to the public, I would not want to be part of a committee that abolished a long-standing parliamentary tradition, even though I myself am not a long-standing parliamentary tradition.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Adam.
Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: I think Adam just said much of what I was going to say. I, too, would not support this motion. I do agree with Gary's comments; it has not worked as well as I think it should have.

With respect to the issue of question period, though, the Public Accounts Committee, as it's currently structured, has one and a half hours per week to deal just with this one issue and that is the past expenditures of whatever government department is up on that particular meeting day. Question period, now that we've shortened our legislative work week to four days, is only a little more than three hours in total to deal with all of the issues across the entire spectrum, all of the issues regarding education and health care and social services as well as public accounts and past expenditure issues. There is no way in the world I would advocate that anyone should spend the time of question period on as extensive a basis percentagewise as what we are currently getting to evaluate public accounts. To then say we could take an hour – even reducing it an hour or even 45 minutes out of the total of question period time to deal with the Public Accounts Committee to me would be more of a disservice. So I would add those comments to what Adam had said earlier on.

8:58

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? We have a motion before us to abolish the Public Accounts Committee.
Louise.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Could I make a suggestion that maybe Mr. Brassard's motion should read that the Standing Orders be amended to provide for the abolishment? The committee is established by the Standing Orders, so we'd have to amend the Standing Orders.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you comfortable with that, Roy?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, I'm comfortable with that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; that's a rewording, then, of the motion.

MR. BRASSARD: I understand. I thank you, Louise.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll call for the question. All those in favour of Mr. Brassard's motion? Opposed? The motion appears to be defeated.

Moving on then. I'm at the will of the table here, and I'll ask either Mr. Bruseker or Mr. Germain: did you want to address the points from the Alberta Liberal caucus, or how did you want to proceed?

MR. BRUSEKER: Perhaps we could start with one. In looking at Grant's letter, if members have it before them – it was distributed earlier on – one of the issues we have is with the size of the committee. This was mentioned in other issues. I'm picking this out of a hat, so to speak. This is point (h) in Grant's letter. I wonder if I could make a motion that we reduce the size of the Public Accounts Committee. For purposes of debate I'll throw out the number of 11 members to be given consideration. So I would propose that

the Public Accounts Committee be reduced from its current size to 11 members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motions like this – again, Louise, it has the same preface of changing Standing Orders?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Standing Orders don't specify that the Public Accounts Committee have 21 members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. You can just advise us as we move along if it needs that.

So the motion is to reduce the size of the Public Accounts Committee to an overall number of 11. Is that correct?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes, including chairman and deputy chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Did you want to speak to that, Frank?

MR. BRUSEKER: Just briefly. We have a large committee. It makes it difficult for members to really ask pointed questions, I think, and really investigate a topic when often they only get one kick at the cat, as it were, during Public Accounts Committee. Reducing the size and perhaps getting people who are keenly interested in this sort of thing would make it a more tightly run and more vigorous committee.

MRS. LAING: Frank, could I ask a couple of questions? Now, you said: including the chairman and the vice-chairman. Eleven members in total then?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes.

MRS. LAING: What would you see as the breakdown, then, according to representation?

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I think we would follow the same procedures of what we've done in the past, and that would be based on percentage of parties in the House. Currently we have two parties that are roughly in a 5 to 3 kind of distribution, and I would expect a Public Accounts Committee would reflect that. I would like to see the chairmanship of this committee remain, as it has in the past, with whichever party is the Official Opposition. In the past the deputy chairman has always been from the

government side of the House, and proportion to be broken down appropriately. If we had a Legislature with perhaps a third party, we might say it might need to increase to 13 members. I generally find that the smaller the group the more efficiently it works.

MRS. LAING: Thank you.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, of all of the suggestions that were put forward, I found this one being the most incongruous. At a time when we have heard so much request for open government, open information flow, and so on and so forth, to reduce the number of members to a restricted number at this time just seems to be contrary to everything we have heard being proposed. It was mentioned that there was very limited exposure to some of the ministers – a little committee discussion in the House, I think, was referred to – but I can't help but go back and see the opportunities that we now have to challenge a minister almost every step of the way. We can demand that a minister appear before this committee at any time. We can also bring the ministers in during estimates. We can designate them in estimates; we designate them for a four-hour interrogation of the department. We expose them to question period on a daily basis while in session. I think that if indeed, as was presented here, the need for this committee as such is a learning experience, is exposure, is an openness of dissemination of information, then I really find it strange that we would be wanting to restrict that now to a limited number of people or a select few. If we're going to have this committee, then I don't see anything wrong with the 21 members participating. It's true that perhaps some of us will only get one or two or three questions asked, but at least in this case 21 of us will get a chance to ask those questions rather than just a chosen few. So I would suggest that the committee stay the same size as it is at present.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I have Gary, Bonnie, and Clint.

MR. FRIEDEL: I actually agree with Frank on the number of people that would have to be on the committee, but the experience this fall was that on any given meeting date there were a number of people missing. If you did that, the makeup of the committee would be very difficult. I recall two meetings where we had just barely half the number of members there. If the same thing happened on an 11-person committee, I don't think it would be very functional. So, if anything, having this number allows at least some people the opportunity not to attend when they have other things that are quite pressing and still have enough people there to have a functional committee. From the perspective of assuming that there is going to be a certain percentage of absenteeism at any time, the 21 isn't that bad a number.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Gary.
Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think there are ways that could be enforced so that you would have more time for questioning, such as maybe having a limit on how long preambles could be or maybe outlawing preambles as well. I know that the last session that I was on the committee, we tightened it up quite a bit, and we actually did get two or three questions, depending on, as Gary has said, the number of people who came. So I think there are ways that could be addressed to make it more open so that people would have more chances.

Also, I think that committee is a learning committee. You certainly learn a lot about the departments. You certainly learn

about the things that are being done. Sometimes details are brought out that you would probably not have the opportunity to learn about except through the discussion and the questions between the members and the minister. So I think it's quite a valuable committee. If we tighten it down too small in numbers, you sort of lessen the opportunity for people to have that experience to learn those kinds of details.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Clint.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, if it's permissible, through the chair to Frank: in the configuration of 11 then – and help me with my math – is that 6 and 5 or 7 and 4?

MR. BRUSEKER: Probably 7 and 4.

MR. DUNFORD: Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion on this point?
Adam.

MR. GERMAIN: It seems to me that there would be a cost saving with a smaller size committee. It also seems that, especially if we led into some of these other issues where it might meet when the Legislature wasn't sitting, just like a good hockey player, people who are involved more in the process in the smaller group would get more out of it and more would be accomplished. The bigger the group the more the political rhetoric. I happen to worship at the altar of those people who say that results are disproportionate to the number of people that you have doing the job: the more you have, the less result you get. So from an effectiveness point of view, I would certainly support the theme here.

My only worry is the issue Bonnie raised, and that is that if we identify this as a learning experience and as a training ground, it seems to me, then, that if the committee was opened and everybody who wanted to come in for the training benefit could, or those people who weren't part of the committee would get that training benefit through the report back, we would solve both of those problems. I don't know how much mileage we'd get from the public point of view if we admit that committees are being structured simply to assist in the learning curve. People that get elected to office, whether rightly or wrongly, are supposed to have the necessary skills and resources to do the job. If there is any on-the-job training, it's not something that I think governments have ever publicized.

9:08

MR. JONSON: Just a brief comment, Mr. Chairman. I don't believe that as Public Accounts currently operates, there's any increased cost involved in the number of members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Because it only meets during session?

MR. JONSON: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you for that clarification.
Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just to make a few closing comments. Clint, just going back to your question, this committee is a committee of 11, and it's split 7 and 4, so I presume Public Accounts would be the same if it were to become an 11-member committee.

Speaking to Roy's concern about wanting to get information out and so on, everything that any committee does in the Legislature is always reported in *Hansard*, of course, so the information is available if people choose to read *Hansard*. This is another issue. I'm not sure that members necessarily go home and pore over it. I know that during Electoral Boundaries the chairman pored over *Hansard* on a regular basis, but I'm not sure that all members are quite so diligent. The information would in fact be disseminated, but whether or not people choose to avail themselves of that is another issue.

Another point was with respect to limited membership. The budget subcommittees that are established to look at five departments for four hours indeed have a limited membership. I presume members report back to their respective caucuses as to what it is that proceeded in there, so having limited membership is certainly nothing new. In fact, all of our committees have limited membership. What I'm proposing is to limit this one back down to a more reasonable sort of membership. I think a committee of 21, if I'm not mistaken, is probably the largest committee of any committee that we have in the Legislative Assembly.

With respect to the learning aspect, because everything is available in *Hansard* the only real learning experience that I see being available here for individuals – of course anyone who is a member of the Legislature can attend any committee meeting. They don't necessarily have the voting authority, but they can attend any committee meeting, and they can listen in. Certainly again they can read comments that are made in *Hansard*, so the only real learning aspect, I guess, would be participation in Public Accounts Committee, although, yes, there are times when I've had probably two questions and I think even on the rare occasion would have perhaps had even three sets of questions. The only real learning experience, then, is asking questions, and I'm not sure that's necessarily a justification in its own right for having 21 members.

If 11 is too small, I'd certainly be willing to consider an amendment to the number, if that's the desire, but I'm certainly of the opinion that 21 is far too large a committee to be an effective committee of this Legislature.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You suggested an amendment.
Louise.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I'd just like to mention that it is the largest standing committee of the Assembly, with the exception of Public Affairs, where all members are members of that particular committee.

MR. BRUSEKER: But how often has that met in the last decade?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: The last time? It met in 1983.

MR. BRUSEKER: So it's met once in the last decade.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And Committee of the Whole of course.

MR. BRUSEKER: And committees of the whole and supply. Are those standing committees?

MR. JONSON: No.

MR. BRUSEKER: Those are not standing committees. So with the exception of Public Affairs, that has never met while I've been an MLA – Halvar, were you ever involved with Public Affairs?

MR. JONSON: Yup. It only meets when there are important things to discuss. I did experience that, yes.

MR. BRUSEKER: Do you recall what it is you discussed?

MR. JONSON: Yes.

MR. BRASSARD: Surface rights.

MR. JONSON: No, not during my time. The topic was Bill 44, dealing with the scope and the nature of bargaining for nursing.

MR. BRUSEKER: Oh, okay.

Well, it hasn't met in my experience. Like you said, as far as I am aware then, of a regularly scheduled, regularly occurring committee, this is certainly the largest, and I'd like to see it reduced in size. I'll close my comments with that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You had mentioned a possible amendment. Were you concerned the number might cause you to lose the motion? Do you want to amend that, or do you want to leave it at 11?

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, you know, in the letter that Grant passed around, we said nine to 11. I think nine probably is a little on the small side. I think 11 is a more workable number, so I'd like to leave it out there. If the members would like to propose an alternate, then I'm open to that. I'll leave my motion as it originally stands, suggesting we reduce to 11.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is the motion, then:
that this committee be reduced to 11 members including the chair and deputy chair.
All those in favour of the motion? Okay. Opposed? The motion is defeated.
The next specific that someone wanted to raise?

MR. GERMAIN: Well, Mr. Chairman, is there anything in that November 9 letter – Frank tackled what I thought was the least contentious item there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Germain, far be it from us to presuppose that we would say a blanket no to these suggestions. After all, the first motion that was raised here tonight by a government member was roundly defeated in a split vote, so anything could happen.

MR. GERMAIN: It was the entire structure of the whole committee.

Mr. Chairman, will you run through a series of straw votes to see if there is some number between 11 and 21 that will move people in the direction of efficiencies, for those people who feel that we don't need to have the largest single committee in this? Rather than go up the line . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, sure. Why doesn't somebody just propose to reduce the size and leave it at that? If you find favour with that particular motion, then we could look at the exact number.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. Well, I'll so move
that we simply reduce the size of the Public Accounts Committee by no specific number, reduce it from 21.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. That is the motion before us then. So this is just on the principle of the size of the committee itself.

MR. BRUSEKER: Exactly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those . . .

MR. BRASSARD: A point of information?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry; I should have asked for discussion.

MR. BRASSARD: Who would finally come up with a number?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That would be the next motion.

MR. FRIEDEL: Well, if this motion is defeated, then we're done.

MR. BRASSARD: Okay. I apologize.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, that's fine. Good question.

Any discussion on this, which is really the motion in principle about the size, not pointing to an exact number? We'll call for the question then. All those in favour of reducing the size of this committee? Okay. Opposed? Did everybody vote?

MR. SCHUMACHER: I didn't vote. Was it tied?

MR. GERMAIN: No. It was 4 to 3 as the hands went up.

MR. BRUSEKER: You have to vote, Stan.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Everybody has to vote.

MR. DUNFORD: Then I'm going for coffee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; let's try that again. Yeah, I believe it's a requirement that everybody votes.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, he didn't vote in the other one then.

MR. DUNFORD: But it wasn't close.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah, we got smoked on that one, Adam. There was no fight involved there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Roy got smoked on the other one. [interjection] We've been corrected actually. We believe the terminology is: you got piped.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; the motion is to reduce the size of the committee. All in favour? Opposed? The motion to reduce the size of the committee is carried.

From there we would, I suppose, like to go to a number now. I'm presuming.

9:18

MR. GERMAIN: So it's between 11 and 21, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Correct. It has to be an odd number, and it will probably be a prime number.

MR. BRUSEKER: A prime number? Well, I don't know.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, it could be 15. That's true. Okay. Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: I move that we set the number at 17.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; we have a motion to set the number at 17.

MR. BRASSARD: That's a prime number too.

MR. BRUSEKER: That is a prime number, yes. He was taking your cue really well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, 19 was out there; 19 was available, which I was really hoping he'd glom onto but he didn't.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, the median point is 16, but of course that's an even number.

Can I ask why 17?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, if we're compromising here, I guess that's as good a compromise as I can -- I have no trouble with 21. I think there's a great benefit, as Bonnie and others pointed out, to have as many members as possible there. If I'm going to have to compromise, I can compromise to 17 without seriously compromising.

MR. BRUSEKER: This is a moderate compromise, then, is what you're saying.

MR. BRASSARD: A moderate compromise, yes. I guess that's the best way to put it, Frank. It seemed like a good number to me.

MR. FRIEDEL: What are the other alternatives that work well in number splits?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, basically you want an odd number. It has to be an odd number, so we're looking at 15, 17, or 19.

MR. GERMAIN: Or 13.

MR. BRASSARD: We're looking at 17 right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, but the question was: what are the permutations and combinations?

MR. GERMAIN: I'd like to propose an amendment to that motion knocking it down to 15.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have a motion to make it 17, which has been amended to 15.

MR. BRASSARD: Question on the amendment.

MRS. LAING: Doesn't the mover get the right to accept the amendment?

MR. BRASSARD: No, I don't think so. I don't think that's the way it works.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is a rough justice committee, this one.

MR. BRASSARD: Somebody could amend it to 13.

MR. BRUSEKER: That would be a subamendment.

MR. BRASSARD: Question on the amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that the question then? To 15?

MR. BRASSARD: On the amendment. That's the amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right; question on the amendment to reduce this to 15 then. All those in favour? Opposed? Okay; it's rejected at 15.

MR. BRASSARD: The original question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We go back to the original question. The motion has been proposed for 17 members. All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried. That one is unanimous.

The makeup of the committee in terms of numbers.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, 11 and six is fine.

MR. JONSON: Yeah, that's good. I'll move it: 11 and six.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Halvar has moved that the committee makeup be 11 and six. Any discussion?

MR. BRUSEKER: This is the one committee chaired by a member of the opposition. By doing it 11 and six, it in effect puts the members of the opposition that are there to question at basically five, because the chairman, of course, doesn't ask questions. If we went with the 10 and seven, effectively what you'd get is that because the chairman doesn't cast a vote unless you have the odd situation where there is a tie-breaking vote required, it still gives a clear majority to government. Effectively 10 and six is virtually the identical representation that we have in our Legislature right now, where it's sort of a five and three split with the Speaker coming out. So I would amend that to 10 and seven instead of 11 and six. Ten and seven is the total, with one of the seven of course being the Official Opposition chairperson.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Speaking to the amendment.

MR. FRIEDEL: I'd just ask a question. Does the chairman now vote?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: The chairman only votes if there's a tie.

MR. BRUSEKER: The same as the Speaker only votes in the event of a tie.

MR. FRIEDEL: So there is in effect, though, a voting privilege.

MR. BRUSEKER: In rare instances. In fact, when we were on the Electoral Boundaries Committee, there were cases where the chairman did have to cast a ballot. That was a committee of seven with four government members, two New Democrat members, and one Liberal member. There were times when the chairman did cast the deciding ballot. Yes, that has happened.

MR. JONSON: Would you just refresh my memory as to the split on the current 21-member committee?

MRS. DACYSHYN: It's 13 to eight.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Chairman, just a brief comment. I think the original motion was 11 to six, which preserves the same proportion, as I calculate proportions at least. Therefore, I would support the 11 and six.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Could I make a comment, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Traditionally the representation on committees has been based on the proportionate representation in the House. There hasn't been a committee that has established how many come from the government side and how many come from the opposition side as is being proposed now.

MR. FRIEDEL: I was in fact just going to ask that same question: it hasn't been established by the committee we sit on?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: No, it hasn't. It's always been based on proportionate representation in the House.

MR. FRIEDEL: So is it within our mandate to even make the recommendation then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, a committee of the Legislature can make any recommendation. Remember, we are making this recommendation back to the Legislative Assembly.

MR. BRUSEKER: We can recommend anything.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can recommend anything; right. In some cases, maybe even in most cases, representation is proportional. Mr. Jonson has argued that the proportion is roughly the same. That's up to anybody's math. Before it was 13 and eight. The proposal has been 11 and six. Now we're looking at 10 and seven, the amended. Any other discussion on 10 and seven as being the breakdown?

I'll call for the question, then, on the amendment that the breakdown be 10 and seven. In favour? Opposed? Okay. The amendment is defeated.

Going back to the main question, that the breakdown be 11 and six, all those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Well, I'm sure Mr. Germain is happy to see that the entire letter has not been rejected out of hand. There is indeed openmindedness around the table.

MR. BRUSEKER: Can I put forward another topic for discussion then? The very first issue in the letter is headed "Meeting Times." I'm not sure that I'm really comfortable with that heading of "Meeting Times." It says that Public Accounts meets between 8:30 and 10 on Wednesdays. I have no problem with that time slot. The issue, I guess, that I'd say I feel particular concern about is in the second sentence of that first point. That deals with the concept that in the past we have not been able to meet with all of the ministers.

In the 22nd Legislature, for example, I recall going for a couple of years without seeing the Minister of Health, which of course is the largest single budget department that we have. The former Minister of Education we only saw once, I think, in a three-year time span. Quite frankly, I think that's inappropriate, and I would really like to see some kind of a resolution or a recommendation come from this committee that however it structures itself, either by longer meetings or more meetings or meetings outside of session, we really do ensure that all ministers on an annual basis

come before the Public Accounts Committee. Maybe I'll just make that motion, then, just to focus the discussion, that direction be given to the Public Accounts Committee to meet with each cabinet minister and representatives of the department at least once per fiscal year.

9:28

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the motion would be that each minister is required to meet with Public Accounts at least once during . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: During the fiscal year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Annually.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Discussion on that? Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Mr. Chairman, now that we're going to the two sessions in that they are more or less mandated, would that not be the case? I mean, you've met the Auditor General in the fall, so you don't need to meet him again in, say, February. Then you would just continue on with the rotation of ministers. I think that with the smaller number of ministers you probably would get to each one.

MR. BRUSEKER: Chances are you might. You're probably correct. If we sit 10 weeks in the fall and . . .

MR. SCHUMACHER: Ten weeks in the fall?

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, that's what we sat this time.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Yeah, but I don't think that when we get into a regular year, it's anticipated that that would be the case. It would be more likely four weeks in the fall and maybe 10 weeks in the spring.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. That's 14 weeks. Just working on past experience, typically we've never kicked into gear right away in the first week or two, so often there's a Wednesday or two that are missed. Then there's usually a couple of Wednesdays wherein we've met with the Auditor General. So even if we say over the course of a year, in order to cover all of that we really need to have 20 as minimum, given that we currently have 16 ministers with portfolios. We would need to have at least 20 weeks to cover everything necessary. We seem to have consensus that we wouldn't necessarily have 20 weeks. I guess what I'm saying is that if you're going to have a committee, let's make sure the committee does the job that we've asked it to do. Otherwise, I'm kind of along Roy's line of thinking: there's no point in giving a committee a mandate and only having the committee fulfill a portion of the mandate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you changing your vote on that first motion then?

MR. BRUSEKER: No, that's done. I'm not revisiting that. No, Mr. Chairman.

MR. BRASSARD: We could open it up again if you want, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: I guess I'm just saying that if the Public Accounts Committee doesn't have the opportunity during session,

then they should have the flexibility to call ministers, give them a clear mandate that this is something that should . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have Clint and Roy.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I'm looking for guidance here. I'm probably going to have to vote on something here shortly. I don't have my daytimer with me, but there must have been nine or 10 Wednesdays in this past sitting. How many ministers were at these meetings?

MRS. DACYSHYN: To the best of my recollection, there were four ministers this time around.

MR. DUNFORD: Four ministers. Okay.

The other thing. We do have all of these, you know, where the opposition is allowed to choose five ministers. Then we that are fortunate enough to be selected for select committees – so we can give up our Fridays in our constituency – grill them. Of course, that's on budgets, though, isn't it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Just for clarification, that's part of the estimates process. There are 25 days in estimates to deal with the ministers and then the extra five of four hours each.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Five departments, four hours.

MR. DUNFORD: Five departments, four hours. Okay. Thank you. That's right; it is a different process.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Roy and Gary.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I'd like to pick up on what Clint said and also what Bonnie said because I'm not certain that is an entirely different process. I think that when you discuss where a department is, you can't help but determine where it's been, and that's Public Accounts. I think much of the discussion that took place in those four- or five-hour sessions that we've put in on a Friday really was related to where we are and how we got there. So to some degree that was a public accounts discussion even though it was on a current event.

I also question the fact that in this last 10-week period or whatever it was we were able to interview only four ministers. I think somewhere along the line we've got to be able to do better. Because of the gymnastics and current situations we might even be able to schedule two ministers in the day. I don't know why we can't do that. Certainly I think that with the downsizing of cabinet – we've got 16 ministries now – we have ample time if we're good stewards of that time. We have the right to designate the minister depending on either urgency or whatever. I think we've got ample flexibility in the present sitting days. I don't see why we have to expand. As a matter of fact, I voted in favour of your motion at one time, but I really can't see, given today's schedules that we're facing and the reduced size of cabinet, why we can't schedule all of the ministers to appear before us. If we can't do that, then we really need to get into better time management.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Roy.
Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: Actually, I'm going to take up at the beginning of what Roy said. I honestly believe, in my limited experience on

this committee, that for all intents and purposes it serves the same purpose as the committees of the whole and supply and the kinds of questions that come up in question period. I realize that in general the questions are intended to be different, but the types of questions that are raised are by and large the same thing.

On the record – I'm not so sure a person should be saying this, but you know that a lot of this is jockeying for position, the semantics that are played in partisan politics. I think the same thing really applies in this committee. As a matter of fact, if anything, it's even more so than in a lot of the other all-party committees. For that reason I would have to seriously debate whether the cost of bringing even the reduced number of 17 people in would be a wise expenditure of money. I realize some people live a lot closer than I do, but for me it's about a \$400 round-trip. I think in cost-cutting mode I would have difficulty in supporting out-of-session meetings just for that reason.

MR. BRASSARD: If the meeting goes on long enough, I'm going to revisit my first question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Gary.

I have Halvar and Frank, and given the time, I think we'll draw the discussion to a close after Frank.

MR. JONSON: First of all, just a comment. I expect that this year, which is fairly typical after an election with all the other reorganization that was going on, probably the delay of whatever it was – three weeks? – before it got going would be atypical, although I agree that it usually takes a week or two to get started after the session begins.

I had a question, though, for those who are involved in the committee at present, and that is: how did you select the four ministers that you did interview?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Well, the Public Accounts Committee appointed a subcommittee, being the chairman and the deputy chairman, to decide these issues. I was given a list, and I basically used that list. I had five ministers to contact, and of those five ministers I tried to get them all in in that order or as close to that order as possible.

MR. JONSON: I ask that because of a point that I made, Mr. Chairman, with respect to Mr. Brassard's first motion. That is that I think if we're zeroing in on, yes, the ministers' budgets but also the relationship to the public accounts and how well they performed during the previous year, you might through this process of picking out your priority ministers at the beginning, so to speak, really get to the essence of what your work is. I can see Mr. Bruseker's point in the sense of wanting to cover the whole ballpark, but in reality when you get down your list, my experience has been that the questions have been rather routine, to say the least, as we go through some of the departments which are not in the spotlight of the Auditor General's report.

9:38

MR. FRIEDEL: On this point . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; on this point.

MR. FRIEDEL: I was being a little facetious, but basically that was what happened. The chairman and the vice-chairman were a subcommittee to select ministers that would attend, but for all practical purposes we found that we could have made any number of lists and if the minister wasn't available on a designated day, it

didn't do us any good. The reason we asked for him just to go through the list and find out who might be available: it was a matter of taking our time schedules and slotting people in. It was virtually impossible, even though we tried to do that, to set any order of priority.

The other thing is that we did agree at one of the earlier meetings that we would attempt to interview all the ministers before there was a rotation so that everybody had an opportunity. Needless to say, it didn't work well because of the time restrictions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks for that information, Gary.
Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just to comment briefly. The motion as I made it simply says that the Public Accounts Committee would meet with all the ministers. It doesn't necessarily mean that it would have to be out of session. It's then left to the direction of the Public Accounts Committee to decide how they would deal with it: perhaps on a Friday, perhaps longer meetings or more meetings, or whatever. The motion was crafted in such a way that it would really leave the "when" up to the Public Accounts Committee, and it doesn't necessarily mean outside of session, although it doesn't preclude it either.

MR. BRASSARD: I submit that the committee has that jurisdiction.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Unless there's a compelling other point – I don't want to stifle debate. I'm just looking at the clock; I'm looking at our collective eyelids.

MR. FRIEDEL: What does the motion say?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Halvar, do you have a motion?

MR. JONSON: I was going to make a motion, but it wasn't this one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Yeah, I know what yours is.
Okay. The motion. Can you read it, Corinne?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Mr. Bruseker moved
that direction be given to the Public Accounts Committee to meet with each cabinet minister and department at least once during each fiscal year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour of the motion? Okay; three.
Opposed? It's defeated.

Before we entertain a motion from Mr. Jonson – I have a sneaking suspicion what that motion is – we started six minutes late, and we have gone eight minutes past the posted time. So I think we've made up the deficit there and exceeded it by 20 percent. I hope you appreciate that.

This committee has to report to the Legislature, or if the Assembly is adjourned, must deposit with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and to each member of the Assembly a copy of any deliberations and recommendations on the role and mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts by December 1. That means a couple of days from now. That doesn't mean we have to have finished our deliberations, but I will have to report and send that to the Clerk. What I would ask for your generosity to do is to report that we have indeed agreed to limit the size of

the committee – I will report on that – and that we are continuing . . .

MR. FRIEDEL: Making progress.

MR. CHAIRMAN: . . . making progress and begging leave to sit again, or words to that effect.

Since Mr. Germain and Mr. Bruseker are here tonight, I will send a draft of that to you two gentlemen to make sure it looks all right. If you can communicate back to my office, then we will table that report in line with the order of the Assembly, which is by December 1. Do I have concurrence with that approach? Thank you.

Then we will also get in touch for our next meeting date. One member – I think it was Bonnie – mentioned ways that questions could possibly be tightened up. If you wanted to bring back some further suggestions on that line, it might wind up accommodating some of the concerns Mr. Bruseker, Roy Brassard, and also others had raised about having maybe more than one minister per session. Those were good comments, if you wanted to define them a little clearer.

Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: There were a couple of motions made that I voted against because of some technicality. Am I correct in assuming that we may meet on this topic again sometime during the spring session when we can change or elaborate on our mandate? There are a few things I feel uncomfortable with left as they are.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

MR. FRIEDEL: As I say, I certainly feel that this committee could use some improvement in its mandate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're talking about Public Accounts?

MR. FRIEDEL: Public Accounts, not the one we're sitting on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly these things can be revisited, expanded upon, at the will of the committee.

Okay; I'll get that out, then, as quickly as possible so we can have it tabled by the 1st.

Mr. Jonson had a motion.

MR. JONSON: I move that we adjourn until we meet again.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, before we do that, agenda item 6 is Date of Next Meeting. Are we going to set a date?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Usually what I've done is communicate with Mr. Mitchell to get a date that works for everybody.

MR. BRUSEKER: He agreed to Monday night at 8:30?

MR. FRIEDEL: Well, he knew he was going to be in Lethbridge.

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Chairman, do you have any movement in setting these meetings, where you can return to a Wednesday morning, or is that just not possible?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, I'm subject to the pleasure of the table.

MR. BRUSEKER: Which meeting? Are you talking about this committee or Public Accounts?

MR. GERMAIN: Yeah, this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So Wednesday works better? How does Wednesday work for everybody? Okay; Wednesday seems to be a favourable time. We'll try and shoot for a Wednesday morning. I know it's not going to be a hundred percent.

MRS. LAING: What about Tuesday morning?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Tuesday wouldn't work for myself.

MRS. LAING: Oh, okay.

MR. BRUSEKER: We often have a caucus meeting on a Wednesday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Later on during the day, you mean?

MR. BRUSEKER: We have committee meetings, small group meetings from 9 till 10:30 – we could probably get out at that time – but the main caucus meeting is from 10:30 till 4.

MR. GERMAIN: Just from a cost point of view – like, I had to come down here from Fort McMurray today. It's about a \$500 cost. To reduce the size of this committee by four members . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: A journey well made then. We'll try and accommodate that.

MR. GERMAIN: A good point you raised; the roads were frozen over.

Tuesday night would work. You know, we'd get more bang for the buck; that's all. I mean, we're in your hands, but just from a cost point of view . . .

MR. BRASSARD: By the same token, there are others that are already here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Our members travel also.

MR. GERMAIN: So it's a matter of the best day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll try to weigh it out for the most cost-effective overall. We'll consider both Tuesday evenings and Wednesday.

We have a motion to adjourn. All in favour? Thank you very much for this late night meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 9:45 p.m.]