

4:35 p.m.

Tuesday, January 25, 1994

[Chairman: Mr. Day]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll call the meeting to order. Can we have a motion to approve the agenda? Does anybody want to add any items?

MR. BRASSARD: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour of approving the agenda?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. Thank you. You've had a chance, I hope, to look at the minutes. Any comments on the minutes: additions or deletions? Okay. A motion to approve the minutes as read?

MR. BRASSARD: I move approval of the minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour? Thank you.

Business Arising from the Minutes. No business arising? Okay. Discussion of "Role and Mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts." There has been a fair bit of discussion to date, I'm sure not every item that every person would want discussed, but I'm willing to take some suggestion in terms of progress or where we want to go. Any further discussion on Public Accounts and its role?

MR. MITCHELL: Further discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. We really just dealt with one of the number of proposals that I had made to the committee in my letter of November 9, I think, which was the reduction in the number of members on the committee, and I would like to pursue the rest of those proposals. I don't know how you would like to proceed with that. We could either just go through the list that I'd given or . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Everybody's familiar, I think, and has the list that Grant Mitchell had sent in for discussion, and as I said, we could go through the list if we wanted. The chair is at the mercy of the table.

MR. MITCHELL: I move that we begin at the top where we begin a list of proposals, and I have one that I would certainly present as a list that sooner or later through the deliberation of this committee we would like to see dealt with. I could begin to read them into the record or - have you got that letter there, Stockwell?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, I've got your letter.
Roy Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: I don't have any trouble going through a list of proposals, but I hope we're not going to spend all our time on Public Accounts. We've made so many strides forward with this parliamentary reform that there are other things that I'd like to deal with, and I hope that we're not just going to revolve around Public Accounts. So if we could go through some kind of a list

and yea or nay the recommendations and get on with things, that would be my desire, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Grant.

MR. MITCHELL: We, too, have a list of items beyond the matter of the Public Accounts Committee that we'd like to deal with, and we'd be more than happy to listen to the members' suggestions for items that should be dealt with both with respect to PAC but in particular beyond the Public Accounts Committee, if you'd like to.

MR. BRASSARD: No. Let's deal with Public Accounts and deal with that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, from the point of view of the chair I'm glad to hear there are items that do extend beyond Public Accounts. There seems to be, from Grant's point of view, a desire to get on with discussion on Public Accounts issues. I'm hearing at least one voice saying: let's get on with other issues.

Grant, do you want to just start, then, and we'll see where we go.

MR. MITCHELL: Great. Thank you. So I will start on Public Accounts with the understanding that we will meet in the relatively near future - I don't want it to be forever - to discuss other items as well. Is that okay, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That this committee will meet in the future to discuss other items?

MR. MITCHELL: To finish discussing Public Accounts Committee items and to discuss other possible reform items and the possibility that further meetings would begin to occur during the session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's certainly my aim, because I think we've got quite a mandate, and public interest in terms of people seeing genuine reform, I think all of us would like to see some strides made there. So the meetings will continue through the session, and any member of this committee is able at any time to bring forward a proposal. Whether we feel we dispensed with a certain area, if there's some aspect of that area that people want to continue discussion on and they can get their committee members to agree, then that happens.

MR. MITCHELL: Great.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, can we just read in those items that members have on their minds right now for discussion so that we can be thinking of them between now and the next meeting?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. So do you want to move from the discussion on Public Accounts, then, at this point?

MRS. HEWES: I don't want to move away from Public Accounts. What I'd sort of like to have is a list in my mind of the discussion items and then go to it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. If you turn to tab 8, it's been an interesting process here to look at sort of a progress report on items that had come up on the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform topics, things that have been discussed before. I don't have any problem having on record to the credit of the House leader for the Liberals, Grant Mitchell, and the then

House leader for our caucus, Mr. Kowalski, that both individuals brought forward concerns of their respective caucuses. I think that to the credit of both caucuses quite a bit of progress was made. I actually see it as breakthroughs on a number of items, and I think we all recognize that. Those have been listed here. I recognize that on each of these members might not say, "That's a hundred percent settled the way I want to see it settled," but I think we can recognize that some progress was indeed made. Election of the Speaker, obviously; voting procedures; free votes: we were trying our wings on that last session. For both caucuses it was an interesting and scary exercise, I think, but we did in fact go down on record as having free votes, and we saw that for the first time on a number of issues in the Legislature. The question period format – all of these things have been areas of concern or question or areas wanting readjustment by either members or the public, and to the credit of the process last time, there was progress made.

So in reference to your question, Bettie, then following that page appendix A – you made a point of saying "randomly" here. We have a list of items that came up for discussion with the last review that was in place, actually, and never did reach completion. So if you wanted to move down these – if we had an idea or a sense of some kind of priority from this committee, I think we could really start diving into some of these issues.

MR. BRUSEKER: Could I put another one on the table?

MR. CHAIRMAN: At any time.

MR. BRUSEKER: I would call the topic opposition Bills. Let me just explain what I mean by that and then put it on the list, and people can mull it over for now. On our Order Paper there are government Bills, private members' Bills, and then Private Bills. Government bills are those Bills sponsored by a cabinet minister, and they show the direction and philosophy of the government as opposed to a private member's Bill. So from one side of the House, from the government side of the House, in a sense there are two classes of Bills: there's a government direction Bill, and then private members can put forward their own Bills. So what I'm suggesting is that perhaps we amend our Standing Orders. Maybe it's a subsection under that one, but I'm wondering about the concept of having both private members' Bills on the opposition side of the House and, as well, opposition Bills that would give sort of the direction and philosophy of the opposition party were they in fact the government. Of course they're not, but it distinguishes between private members' Bills and a unified direction kind of Bill, which is what I mean by opposition Bill. I'll just throw that on for notice for some consideration at some point in the future, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, if it's agreeable to you, Frank, I'll just jot that under page 3 here under appendix as number 34. Grant.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks, Stockwell.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Or are you disagreeing with Frank? You don't want that on there?

MR. MITCHELL: No, I think it should be listed.

We have some others that I could read into the record as well, some of which may be on this list but some of which may not. So I'd like to read in ours, and then perhaps we could agree on a

process for kind of whittling down duplication and prioritizing. Maybe you and I could be a subcommittee to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Sure.

MR. MITCHELL: The election of the Speaker: while we feel we have an excellent Speaker, and we think the process worked extremely well in spite of itself this time . . .

4:45

MR. CHAIRMAN: Stan's being overcome with humility at this point.

MR. MITCHELL: . . . we would view this only as partially implemented, and we would like to take it one step further to have the system that was originally implemented by the federal Conservatives, which is that you don't have that nominations process. Instead, anybody can stand, and you can have repeat ballots until such time as one person is left with 50 percent plus 1.

Freedom of information . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Election of speaker, nomination process.

MR. MITCHELL: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And finally, after the federal Conservatives are defeated, you're now saying you agree with something they were doing?

MR. MITCHELL: No. We agreed with that even before they were defeated on this particular thing.

Now, freedom of information. We think that is a high priority. We're of course willing to wait until we see the legislation that we're being told the government will present, but we'd like to leave that as an issue in case more work needs to be done.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So I'll put: freedom of information, pending proposed legislation.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah.

The appointments process. The government has promised to follow the Auditor General's recommendations. We haven't seen anything in particular in place yet, anything formalized. While there has been a strong commitment on the part of the Premier to do this, we would like to assist him in formalizing that process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. MITCHELL: Conflicts of interest. Yes, progress has been made. We still think that the length of time of the cooling off period is an issue, and we're proposing one year instead of six months.

Free votes. Our feeling is that we've made tremendous progress, and offhand I don't see where we could actually improve at this time.

Recall hasn't been implemented. We'd like to raise that at this committee.

Complainant protection; that is, whistle-blower protection.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that's listed under 18.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Good. I haven't had a chance to compare it.

MR. BRUSEKER: I think recall is as well, Grant.

MR. MITCHELL: Recall as well? Okay. All right.
Fixed terms.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Recall is there, and fixed terms is there.

MR. MITCHELL: Fixed terms; that's right. Fixed elections.
Yes; okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That would be 24. We're just adopting these numbers for convenience's sake.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah.

Fixed dates for by-elections. We would like to have it that by-elections would always be a set time, not up to six months, but a set time specifically after the resignation or the death of a member.

Question period answers. We'd like to at least acknowledge a stronger role of the Speaker in encouraging answers to questions as he encourages good questions.

Sub judice we have dealt with.

Budgetary reform. Efficiency audits. We'd like to discuss that here, the role of the Public Accounts Committee in particular in specifying them. Some of these will fall under the Public Accounts Committee role.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, we'll have a separate number for Public Accounts, and then any of these items can go under that.

MR. MITCHELL: All right. I have some others, then, that wouldn't fall under that.

MLAs' salary and reimbursement review. We are presenting a Bill on this, but depending on what happens to the Bill.

We've got quarterly budget updates.

We've got Public Accounts tablings.

Three-year planning. It seems like we've got that.

Issuing government contracts in public. We'd like to review the contracts issuing process.

MR. BRUSEKER: Seventeen.

MR. MITCHELL: Seventeen's there. Okay.

We'd like to review the size of all of our legislative committees, as we have done with the Public Accounts Committee. We think some of them at least can be smaller.

We don't want to become too bureaucratic or cumbersome about this, but we'd like to implement some process to evaluate the reforms that have been put in place to see how we think they're doing. Maybe it's a question of our caucuses talking about it and then you and I, Stockwell, meeting with it. That one should be on the list.

Then we have some Public Accounts Committee proposals that I could present separately.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. DUNFORD: Does smoking in the Leg. come under this?

MR. MITCHELL: That's a very good one. Smoking in the Legislature - making the Legislature Building a nonsmoking building?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I guess that's a form of reform; isn't it?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, yes, it would be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It could be reforming the destiny of some of the chairmen too.

Okay. Do other members want things added to this list so that we can begin some kind of prioritizing? I recognize that a lot of you had input on the former list, as we call it here, and your items are already here.

MR. MITCHELL: Public Accounts Committee proposals then? Can I . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; that's our list for now. Again that's not an exhaustive list. It can be added to at any time, but that'll give us something to work on, prioritize, and get a sense of what we can really make some headway on.

So a request by Grant Mitchell to revert to discussion, then, on Public Accounts.

I should say that our agenda says till 5:30, and a number of members do have meetings beginning at 5:30. Are you comfortable with an adjournment at about 5:20? I'll just say that now so that we don't appear to be interrupting debate.

MR. DUNFORD: I'm comfortable with an adjournment at 5:20.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. All right. Thanks.
Grant, go ahead.

MR. MITCHELL: On Public Accounts Committee reform, the first one that we would propose would be that the Public Accounts be permitted to meet year-round in order to meet with as many ministers as possible.

Currently the way the session is structured and the time it takes to get Public Accounts under way, Public Accounts is unable to review very many departments. When I was on it, it would be lucky to review four or five, and while we're not suggesting that it needs to review every department every year, there certainly is need from time to time to review more than are able to be reviewed during the sitting.

We appreciate that expense can be a problem. Therefore, we would propose this under the consideration that MLAs waive fees for this committee because this would be additional work over what committee work has generally been done as a practice to this point, and that as much as possible these meetings be structured around government and opposition caucus meetings so that people are in here in any event and there isn't extra travel.

We would be open to suggestions as to specifying the minimum number of departments that need to be reviewed, as has been done in part at the general budget level where we specified five could get a special review. I would like to throw that open for discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If the committee is agreed, from the point of view of process, since Grant appears to be taking these in order of the written material, as chairman I'll just consider each one of these as a motion.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Then as much discussion as wanted, and we'll call for a vote on each one.

Okay. Other discussion on this as far as meeting all year round as opposed to the present schedule?

MR. FRIEDEL: I expect from your comments, Grant, that your primary reason for doing this is so that all or at least most of the ministers could be addressed at least once. First of all, is that correct?

MR. MITCHELL: I think, Gary, it's a really legitimate question. I don't think we would say that we have to meet with all 17 every year by any means. While I can't speak for my caucus, I know that what Ken Kowalski and I went through in this sort of negotiating process – I think we could probably specify a number that we would have to meet with, and then any in addition to that would be negotiable as required. A number that comes to my mind would be 10, so we would meet with 10 departments' ministers each year to make sure that they were reviewed actively and intensely by the Public Accounts Committee, understanding that that's a bit of a trade-off against cost, the overburden of committee work, and so on.

MR. FRIEDEL: But that's primarily the reason why you were doing this?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes.

4:55

MR. FRIEDEL: I'm looking now at the setup, where we're going to be here for two sessions each year. You know, if we sit three months in the spring and probably a slightly shorter period in the fall, we're looking at perhaps even five months. Assuming that there are always one or two weeks lost for other commitments, you're still going to have 10 or 12 opportunities in there, and with the new reform in session times maybe that objective has been met.

MR. MITCHELL: That makes a lot of sense. Would we be able to specify, then, a number of 10 departments, and if we have nine weeks the odd time, which is unlikely to occur, then we'd review one outside that period of time? But your point's really well taken; we could in most years really readily review 10 departments without even having to have special meetings outside the session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bonnie, then Roy.

MRS. LAING: A question to Grant: would it be 10 for the year? What would be the time frame for the 10?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, to follow up on Gary's proposal, we'd get the Public Accounts Committee report for the preceding fiscal year and start discussing those departments in February. By the end of the fall session we would have discussed 10, or we'd go one or two meetings subsequent to that, whatever it took to get to 10. It would be for the preceding reported year by the Auditor General.

MRS. LAING: Would you rotate through the ministers then? We did that, I know, when I was on. We had a list, and we went down in order. That way you pretty well got all of them over a period of time.

MR. BRUSEKER: The problem with that, though, is that large departments like the Department of Health, for example, in the past, when I was on the committee, didn't come up for three years. I think what you'd want to do is prioritize and hit some of the larger departments, and some of the smaller departments in terms of dollars and cents might not be dealt with.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I've got Roy, and then Bettie.

MR. BRUSEKER: Sorry.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, Mr. Mitchell will recall that I got very embroiled in this question right off the bat when we were first elected, but since then, Mr. Chairman, there have been a lot of changes made. The two sessions that we will be facing per year, as was already raised, the five in-depth meetings that are currently planned for discussion: we went through it last year and worked very well. I would just point out that you can't really talk about where a department is going currently without at least referring to where it's been. So I would think that a lot of the discussion that perhaps might legitimately be raised in Public Accounts is brought up in those in-depth discussions with the departments. We've got an expanded question period. I just don't know how much more of this kind of discussion we're going to have.

I guess the final thing I would like to refer to, though, is one that's very basic in my estimation, and that's a responsible use of our time in the first place. I don't know how many meetings last session in Public Accounts were basically spent just wrangling, as far as I can understand. I find it hard to believe that there aren't days when two departments could be brought before a Public Accounts Committee and dealt with. I really have a lot of trouble expanding the scope of this committee at this time. I really do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.
Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: I think Grant's on the right track. This is obviously something that we have talked about at some length in our caucus. I think that in the spirit of getting more information and more open discussions I'd be quite prepared to go along with Gary's notion that if we set a limit of 10, chances are we could cover those 10 within the context of the spring and fall sessions and not have any outside of those sessions. Mr. Chairman, we're going through a stage of very dramatic difference, and I think it's extremely important that this committee have a chance to discuss those in depth. I'm interested in Bonnie's suggestion that it be in rotation, but I would not support that. I think there are some departments that certainly need and would beg for greater scrutiny; a minister would want an opportunity to defend certain things that have happened. I would suggest that 10 departments would be an optimum number. They might be the same departments every year.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that in the interests of openness we probably need more opportunity for Public Accounts Committees to discuss departments with the minister rather than less. Particularly now, Roy. I think we're at a very critical stage.

MR. BRASSARD: If I could just respond, I couldn't agree more, but I think there would be more responsible discussion take place if there was some kind of constraint. With two sessions I think it's quite conceivable that we would get to 10 departments, but without any sense of urgency brought into the committee, we could spend literally all our time wallowing around in debate and not dealing with the departments at all and have to deal with the 10 departments out of the sessions. I have no trouble with the 10 departments coming before the committee, but I think it can be handled quite easily in the two sessions that are being planned, Mr. Chairman. I think it can be handled under the existing format. That's my feeling.

MR. FRIEDEL: First of all, I did not suggest a minimum of 10; I just said it mathematically should work, in response to Grant's suggestion of 10. The number, whatever it is, with approximately five months of session should accommodate roughly that number. Also, I don't think there's a real problem within the committee as it sits now regarding a method of selecting the ministers that attend. As a matter of fact, we had attempted to predesignate, if you like, ministers to attend specific sessions, and we ran into so much problem with conflicting schedules that we just left it up to Corinne to book whoever she could. It was almost like a random choice, because we didn't sit there and spend a number of meetings wrangling who was to come next; it was more of a mechanical thing done by staff. I can't really see much of a better way of doing it. I have no personal problems whether it's in actual rotation or if you want to pick what you might call primary departments. I have no problems with that in any way.

I would like to echo, though, what Roy said. We spend so much of the time wrangling. The questions are almost philosophical differences, how the question is focused depending on which side of the House you sit on. I really have to question the value of some of the time we spend. That's probably the main reason why I object to additional meetings outside of the House. I question the value of a lot of the time I've spent in the committees, even when we were here. Pardon me for being blunt, but I think we've all expressed that opinion at one time or another.

MR. MITCHELL: Certainly I wouldn't have a lot of difficulty with your argument that given that we're meeting longer – or, at least, we have a set time to meet – it's likely we'll get through more departments. But there are a couple of things that would be required to make sure we got through more departments. Maybe there are rules that we can write into it. For example, Public Accounts has to find a way to start its meetings within the first two or three weeks of the session and so on. I've been on it when it didn't meet for a long time. Certainly we chair it, but sometimes these things can have a problem. So if we can specify some rules like that to make sure we got started and we kept going and weeks weren't missed, I think we would probably get to a target that's pretty reasonable.

To make us feel more comfortable from the point of view of the openness and the fairness of the process, some other rules could be specified that seem to me might make a difference. For example, I think we wouldn't want a straight rotation. We'd like to have it written into the record that there's a selection process. It may be that a given department is run so well that you don't have any worries and you never have to look at it. You would think that probably many of the departments are like that. On the other hand, it may be that you have massive cuts in health care in a given year and more massive the next year so that you really have to look at them each year. So we'd like to have a process that specifies a prioritization and that will allow given departments to be reviewed annually. We've had some pretty positive experience with the process that was implemented before with the chairman and the vice-chairman establishing that with input from the committee. We wouldn't have any trouble with that, I think, but we'd have to take it back to caucus, of course, for approval.

One thing that would really make it very helpful to us would be to have a parallel proposal like the designated supply subcommittee proposal, where the opposition party gets to specify five departments. Ken and I worked that out, and the caucus has supported it. It really was a wonderful thing for us. We think that although we have to work harder to make those work better, there were some moments in those designated supply committees where they worked extremely well. So I would pick a number.

5:05

MRS. HEWES: Take 10.

MR. MITCHELL: Ten. No.

If we could specify four departments – or five departments would be nice and symmetrical with the budget process – the opposition could specify those, and we would meet on a weekly basis throughout the two sessions each year. We would therefore review what we would review, always remembering that we would always review the Auditor General, and the Treasurer probably, which has been pretty standard in there. Something like that would make it work very well for us, I think, for everybody on both sides of the House.

I'd also say that I agree with you. The process of questioning needs work. In that committee we have worked very hard. The Speaker has been at us, and rightly so, to tighten up question period questions. We'll make a commitment to tighten up those kinds of questions. I think you'll see there's been some of that in the heritage trust fund. We're really working to do it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: I was just going to get a clarification. You're suggesting that regardless of the number of sessions the opposition would get to select four or five of those that would fit in the rotation at some point.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. We'd be guaranteed to discuss those four or five. Probably they'd be pretty early on in the process so we didn't run out of time, but if we did run out of sitting time, we'd still get them. I don't think that's a big problem because we wouldn't run out of sitting time if the committee was run expeditiously.

MR. FRIEDEL: You didn't mean four or five and they would come back several times to take up the time.

MR. MITCHELL: No, no. Once. Of all the departments that we got to, we would have the right to specify four or five . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Once in a fiscal year.

MR. MITCHELL: Once in a fiscal year.

. . . and that the committee would be required to meet with the Auditor General – they always do – and probably would be required to meet with the Treasurer, because they always do, and maybe the Premier, because they always should.

MR. FRIEDEL: Now you're up to seven.

MR. MITCHELL: Now we're up to seven. Well, you know where I'm going. For us that would offer something. You can specify every other department, because you have a majority, in the final analysis, and we wouldn't fight with that. As Ralph says, we lost.

MR. BRASSARD: I can understand the concern that's being expressed, but this is not an opposition committee. This is a committee made up of whatever members we agreed on the last time. To designate certain people coming forward in isolation of the committee of the whole I think is irresponsible. This is not an opposition committee. This is a committee, Public Accounts,

made up of both parties, and I think both parties should determine what departments come before it. I think that quite strongly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have Bettie and Grant.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, Roy, surely this reform committee can forward the ideas to them. I thought that's what we were here for.

MR. BRASSARD: I've no trouble with that as long as the committee of the whole vote on what departments come before it. I think that's the responsibility of the entire committee. What you're saying: it's of more value to the opposition members what departments come forward than it is to the government members. I disagree with that.

MRS. HEWES: What I'm understanding from Grant is that the opposition members of that committee would have the right of specifying a certain number of the departments, and presumably the residue would be agreed to by the whole. You've got the majority.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Grant, and then Frank. On that point, Frank?

MR. MITCHELL: First of all, you could argue two points. You could argue, Roy, that the Legislature is not an opposition Legislature, yet you allowed – you voted for it, and we voted for it – the ability of the opposition caucus to specify five departments for subcommittee review. So this proposal isn't inconsistent with that. We'd be more than happy to say that you get to specify whatever number of departments you want to specify or as many as we do or more. If you want to do it on a proportional basis, that'd be okay too.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I think we're comparing apples and oranges, in all fairness. That was an agreed upon procedure where the opposition would have five departments sit down in isolation and go through their department in detail. That was one of the new reforms. We're talking about a committee that's established. I question whether we need it. We've already dealt with that, so if we're going to have it, I think we have to treat it like a committee of the whole. To hive it into compartments within that committee I don't think is right. I've made my point anyway.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just on the issue of the selection of which departments come forward, in the 22nd Legislature it was in fact that the Public Accounts Committee as a group selected the list that would be selected. That changed, in my opinion for the better, when in this Legislature the chairman and vice-chairman together formed a subcommittee on agenda and selected some members. The difficulty with having the committee as a whole select the agenda of ministers to come before it is that, quite frankly, my experience was that it was ramrodded through by the government side of the House. We kept on seeing the same ministers coming forward, and the big departments like Health and Education didn't come forward for three years. It was a perpetual source of frustration for at least myself as one member of that committee. I think moving to at least having the chair and vice-chair come up with the list was an improvement. I'm speaking against the idea of going back to the committee as a whole voting on that because I don't think it worked well.

MR. BRASSARD: My reference to the committee of the whole – I would say it could very well be represented by the subcom-

mittee representing that committee of the whole. I have no problem with that. I just have trouble with the partisan portion of that committee representation. That's my concern.

MR. FRIEDEL: Can I clarify something?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, go ahead, Gary.

MR. FRIEDEL: What in fact happened the last time around – Muriel and I were the subcommittee – we found that we made lists; the ministers could or could not attend in whatever particular order, so we finally just agreed that Corinne could phone and see who could come to a particular meeting. It was not as democratic as it appeared, because it was just delegated.

MR. DUNFORD: So you're in on this; are you?

MR. BRUSEKER: So it's your fault.

MR. MITCHELL: So now we're back to us having to specify.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I may, given the time we've been on this one of 12 more to go, it looks like our committee is going to be the year-round committee, but that's the will of the members, so that's fine.

Grant, we've gone on some different angles here. Do you want to then clarify your motion? Do you want to leave it simply: have the ability to meet year-round? Is that what you want to stay with, or are you adding some things to that?

MR. MITCHELL: No. I'll move that we agree that the Public Accounts Committee meet throughout both the spring and fall sessions once a week commencing the second week of the spring session, that the committee strive to review at least 10 departments – and on that schedule should be able to do that – that the Auditor General and the Treasurer must be reviewed by the committee, and that the minority caucus on the committee is able to specify three departments . . .

MRS. HEWES: Four.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do we hear five?

MR. MITCHELL: Four departments to be reviewed by the committee, which is, of course, a concession over the number of departments we're able to specify in the budgetary process, so we're going to be in big trouble when we go back to our caucus.

5:15

MR. DUNFORD: You were doing real well until the last point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just on an administrative side, if you're putting in there "once a week," there are some times in the course of a session – the appointments to committees, a break in the middle of session: there are different things that can happen – you may find yourselves on the Public Accounts Committee bound by something that could virtually be impossible.

MR. MITCHELL: So then we say "once a week unless agreed to by the members of the committee."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. It's a multifaceted motion, which runs the risk of an agreeable part getting shot down because one or more are – but that's up to you. I'm just raising that.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, we could split each feature of it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Louise had an administrative point to make.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I was going to point out, if I may, Mr. Chairman, that the commencement of the meetings of the Public Accounts Committee depends on how quickly the committees are appointed at the beginning of the spring session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Actually, I think Grant and I have something worked out where that can happen by waiving certain Standing Orders virtually from the first day. So I think we can accommodate that concern. Thanks for raising that.

Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Could I amend that motion to enable the government caucus to also designate four departments?

MR. BRUSEKER: Sure. It seems like a friendly amendment.

MR. MITCHELL: A friendly amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right; a friendly amendment. Have you got it, Madam Secretary?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Absolutely.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Do you want to just read it back to us? Or do you want to have Mr. Mitchell try reading it?

MRS. DACYSHYN: I think I can read it.

MR. BRASSARD: The Treasurer, the Auditor General, and eight.

MRS. DACYSHYN: My verbs might not be all in the right place here, but we'll try it. Moved by Mr. Mitchell

that the Parliamentary Reform Committee agree that the Public Accounts Committee meet through the spring and fall sessions once a week unless otherwise agreed to by the Public Accounts Committee commencing the second week of the spring session, that the committee strive to review 10 departments and the Auditor General and Provincial Treasurer must be also reviewed by the committee, that the minority caucus on the committee has the ability to specify four departments to be reviewed by the Public Accounts Committee, and that the government caucus also has the ability to specify four departments to be reviewed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's the first time I've heard of an omnibus motion.

MR. FRIEDEL: Can I perhaps suggest one technical correction to it:

Subject to the reasonable availability of the ministers.

If, for example, we got into a wrangle about a particular person not being available because of appointment dates, it wouldn't be considered an infraction.

MR. MITCHELL: I think we'd accept that. The only other thing I'd say, though, is say one of the two caucuses decided to only specify two, and the other one decided - you know, then we'd end up with having reviewed only eight, but we have three weeks left. Could I say that the remainder of departments to be discussed over that weekly schedule would be decided upon by the committee as a whole? Okay?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes.

MR. SCHUMACHER: It's either use it or lose it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Subject to reasonable availability of the minister, and that remaining dates would be subject to the whole of PAC.

Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: I just wondered. Where Grant said "10 departments," and then you say that the Treasurer and the Auditor must be reviewed, could you put in "which would include" so that it's not 12?

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. That wasn't quite the wording. You're right; you're right. No, it's not 12. We would strive to reach 10, period. The committee would always review the Auditor General and the Treasurer, then each caucus gets to specify four. Anything left over would be by agreement.

MRS. LAING: Yeah. It's just that originally it could have been interpreted as 12.

MR. MITCHELL: I agree with that.

MR. BRASSARD: We're back up to 10. I had included the Auditor General in on your four.

MR. CHAIRMAN: For the record, you're not including that in the four, but you are in the 10.

MR. MITCHELL: Yes. Absolutely.

MR. BRUSEKER: Instead of "minority caucus" do we want to have "opposition" in there? Just looking down the road in the event that following the next election you guys are the third party and the NDs are . . .

MR. MITCHELL: "Opposition caucus," please. Let's not antagonize them.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I thought if Roy was going to throw in a little shot there . . . [interjections]

MR. BRASSARD: I haven't voted on it yet.

MRS. LAING: You just lost his vote, Frank. You should have cooled it there.

MR. BRUSEKER: Is that right? Gosh. I had him there for a minute.

MR. MITCHELL: It's a good point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I think we understand the motion. Does anybody not understand it, rather than trying and read it out again? All right. On the motion, then, all those in favour? Opposed?

MRS. HEWES: Look at that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we will be adjourning this meeting on a unanimous note; surprising to everybody around the table, I'm sure. Thanks for the positive input.

Can we contact you for the next meeting? At the next meeting, under instructions from the table here, we will have some sense of priority list of other items. That will follow a meeting between myself and Mr. Mitchell, and we will see where that will take us. So we'll continue to make progress here.

I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

MRS. HEWES: I move it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mrs. Hewes. All in favour.

[The committee adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]