



Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Hansard Verbatim Report

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON CROWN CORPORATIONS
2000**

Andrew Thomson, Chair
Regina South

Ron Harper, Vice-Chair
Regina Northeast

Graham Addley
Saskatoon Sutherland

Greg Brkich
Arm River

Wayne Elhard
Cypress Hills

Ben Heppner
Rosthern

Lindy Kasperski
Regina Sherwood

Don McMorris
Indian Head-Milestone

Peter Prebble
Saskatoon Greystone

Kevin Yates
Regina Dewdney

The committee met at 11 a.m.

The Chair: — I'll call the meeting to order. And we only have two items . . . three items — sorry — on our agenda. Those being attendance at the CCPAC (Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees) conference; authority to travel and hold meetings away from Regina; and three, a report to the House.

Could I have a motion to accept the agenda.

Mr. Addley: — So moved.

The Chair: — Moved. Any discussion? All those in favour. It's carried.

Attendance at the CCPAC conference. There is a motion, I think, that has been circulated in advance, which . . . Mr. Kasperski if you'd like to move a motion.

Mr. Kasperski: — I've got a motion here which I'd like to move. It says:

That the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations authorize the attendance of the Chair and one committee member from each of the government and opposition parties at the 21st annual meeting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts to be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Sunday, September 17 through to Tuesday, September 19, 2000, and further, that the Chair cannot attend he be authorized to designate another committee member to attend in his place.

The Chair: — That's moved. Is there discussion? In terms of the delegates from each side, my understanding is the caucuses will simply make their decision and advise our esteemed Clerk of who will be attending. And so then if there's a change we can facilitate that without coming back through the committee.

Any discussion on the proposed motion?

Mr. Elhard: — Have we done this historically? Is this something that has been accomplished on behalf of this committee previously, or is this something new?

The Chair: — It is new for Crown Corporations though there has been discussion in the past about attending. Having attended the committee . . . or the conference before on behalf of Public Accounts, our system is a little different than what happens in other provinces in that there is some overlap in here in the way that we deal with some of the Provincial Auditor's recommendations.

That plus the fact that I understand Saskatchewan is hosting next year, it would probably be of some use for us to send delegates this time. And obviously next year, we would encourage, I think, all members to participate in the conference when it's here.

Mr. Elhard: — Is there a budget set aside for this kind of cost?

The Chair: — The Clerk's office, the Legislative Assembly Office, picks up the cost for it.

Mr. Elhard: — And can you give me an estimate of what that cost might be?

The Chair: — The NDP (New Democratic Party) members I think stay at the Radisson, and the Sask Party members usually stay at the Quality Inn.

Mr. Elhard: — Well that should look good.

The Chair: — I think the conference fees are about 150 a piece if I'm not mistaken. And it's three days of hotel and per diems plus airfare, which assuming that Air Canada's not on strike and we're not all taking the train out, it shouldn't be too significant.

Is there any further discussion?

Mr. McMorris: — You were saying that there is budget through the Clerk's office. I guess I have a question with how all that works. Is it not — where did that come from? I mean because we hadn't planned this before. Do they just budget a big dollar value and then whoever gets their requests in there . . . or how does that work?

The Chair: — There's usually an accommodation for travel expenses, committee expenses . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . This is not a significant amount of money and so it shouldn't cause it. Meta may not be able to take vacation this summer.

Mr. Elhard: — She doesn't look convinced frankly.

The Chair: — My understanding is that Public Accounts has decided to send four members this year plus the Clerk. It's my understanding we won't be sending the Clerk of our committees. This is about the same size as . . . By the way, at her request, I think.

Mr. Heppner: — Well I think, especially with the fact that we're considering hosting it next year, it's usually a good idea to kind of know how these things run, or what works and what doesn't work.

The Chair: — And we can evaluate after this whether it's a useful event or not. Obviously for next year, we won't have an option and I assume all of us will want to attend. But the year after, we can certainly give some thought as to whether we want to send someone in 2002 or not.

Is there any further discussion? Seeing none, all those all in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Second item of business. I have a draft of a motion here that was not circulated in advance but I believe there has been some discussion about, and that is the motion:

That the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations recommends to the Assembly that the committee be authorized to hold meetings away from the seat of government.

Is there a mover? Moved by Mr. Addley.

Discussion? Just as background, this comes out of our

discussions in December. As you remember, we had some talk about being able to go to Saskatoon or maybe go out to Saskferco or take a look at some of the other investments around the province. This, if the Assembly concurs with it this afternoon, will give us that ability.

Any further discussion?

Mr. Kasperski: — I would think that, you know, just in terms of the discussion, like, when we're out of session, how many of us are from Regina. I mean we're paying likely seven or eight people — or six people anyway at least — to come into Regina when we're out of session. I would think you know . . . I mean not that it's . . . I mean economy. I think there's two things here. It's not going to cost us any more certainly, I would argue.

And secondly, I think it might very much more improve the understanding of the committee members to some of the things that are going on too. I think it opens up some possibilities too.

As you say, it took first-hand to see a few things that we're discussing. So I just thought I'd throw that in, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Elhard: — Yes, I think there's good reason to want to do this from time to time. And, you know, I understand the legitimacy of the reasons. I am concerned that this kind of thing can be open to abuse at some point too. Never with this committee, I'm sure, but future committees may.

I guess the other thing I would like to know is, you know, how reimbursement would take place again. Because I am cost conscious and I am concerned about added costs. If there are per diems and mileage associated with these kinds of things for the committee members, then I think it could get considerably more costly.

The Chair: — My understanding is that the only change is obviously in mileage, which is absorbed by the committee. It doesn't come out of the member's ordinary expenses. Per diems I don't believe change. I think Regina members continue to get the small stipend that they do for attending as opposed to what rural members are able to claim. But those don't change depending on the locale.

Mr. Addley: — . . . as well. I mean, I won't be claiming mileage for meeting in Saskatoon. Ben . . . (inaudible) . . . be claiming significantly less mileage if it's in Saskatoon versus Regina. So my guess — and it's just a guess, looking around the room — it's no more expensive to have the meeting in Saskatoon versus Regina.

Mr. Elhard: — Probably a washout.

The Chair: — There is one additional expense obviously, and that is to have *Hansard* be able to cover us. So we do have that.

When we talked about this in December, I think what we were looking at was largely being able to go up to Saskatoon, taking a look at SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation). I think other members have expressed maybe an interest in taking a look at other . . .

Mr. Addley: — I hope we're not doing . . .

The Chair: — So I think that that's . . . that was largely the rationale we were working on.

Mr. Addley: — I'm sorry. You interrupted me, so I'm interrupting you back.

The Chair: — The Chair never interrupts.

Mr. Addley: — Okay . . . (inaudible) . . . is that I agree with you that I don't think we should be meeting every two weeks in all different parts of the province. But where this comes out of is that we had an idea to go and view something in Saskatoon and we found that the rule precluded that. So I think this just opens that.

If it comes up, I don't think it should be something that we schedule or do on purpose necessarily, but if it's . . . an opportunity presents itself, we can do this.

Mr. Brkich: — When we go to view a facility, would *Hansard* be coming along, and the Clerks, or would we just going to view it? Or to be having a meeting afterwards.

The Chair: — I think that that's the way we would end up doing it, Mr. Brkich, is we would schedule a meeting and then whatever other events we may have.

Mr. Brkich: — And then go check out a facility.

The Chair: — Frankly I think the opportunities for the committee to travel within the province are limited. If for some reason we decide to take on a . . . or another task were referred to us — for instance we had talked at one point about looking at the Public Utility Review Commission piece, which may be coming forward; I'm not sure where that's at right now — we may decide that we want to meet in various communities throughout the province to hear public opinion. That would be the only other example of where I think we might want to travel. But those decisions would be made by the committee.

So this is . . . I think this is just an ability for us to get out and talk to constituents as much as anything and to take a look first-hand at what's happening.

Is there any other discussion? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Final item of business we have is the, I am told, consideration of the first report of the committee. And if I can just read the report. It's very brief. It says:

Thomson as Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations presents the committee's first report, which is as follows:

Your committee in reviewing its business for the current legislature has concluded that the ability to hold hearings away from the city of Regina is needed in order to fully carry out its terms of reference.

Your committee recommends therefore that the Assembly do authorize the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations to hold meetings away from the seat of

government.

Respectfully submitted.

Is there a motion to adopt the report? Mr. Yates.

Discussion? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? It is carried.

May I just add one final item for consideration; it doesn't need to be acted on today. But we should have some discussion perhaps informally about when we want to meet this summer; whether we wish to meet, and what items of business we'd like to carry out.

We may be able to just do that . . . I'm looking primarily to the opposition members to come forward with some suggestion as to which reports they would like to consider and in what order. And perhaps the Chair . . . or the Vice-Chair and myself and Mr. Heppner, as the ranking member on the opposition side, can sort out an agenda for this summer.

Mr. Heppner: — We'd want to kind of see what's all there. Because by and large we'll want to look at a fair number of things.

Now I think the other thing is we should see if people have certain weeks that they're just not available. So that we can, when those are put in place, we already avoid that. That may not work but maybe it does.

Mr. Kasperski: — Generally speaking, Mr. Chair, the second and third week of July some members may be at CPA (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) and also the second week of August. I think after that CPA ones are not . . . It's second and third week of July and that middle week of August whenever the mid-western is. Those are the ones that may have members at.

The Chair: — Is it easier for committee members if we simply schedule say three consecutive days to kind of file through?

Mr. Yates: — It's much cheaper, you know, to have several days in a row.

The Chair: — I think what we had talked about doing was the '98 and '99 — was it the '98 and '99 years consecutively — the annual reports. I don't believe there has been any considerations of the '98 reports at this point.

So we will be able to arrange for officials to come in and discuss both '98 and '99 consecutively. I would assume we would want to start with CIC (Crown Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan) as the major Crown and then work through some of the other larger ones.

But perhaps what we should look at doing is maybe setting aside time towards the — I hate to say the end of August because I don't know where I'm going to be with harvest and such, but . . . I assume it's not going to be that early.

Mr. Elhard: — Mid-August would soon be best, I think.

The Chair: — Okay.

Mr. Heppner: — Mid-August, I'm gone. So here we go with this already.

The Chair: — We could even look in September. I don't think there is anything particularly pressing for us to deal with.

Mr. McMorris: — What about the second week in August?

Mr. Heppner: — August 8 to 20 is when I am gone.

Mr. Kasperski: — The mid-west in Minneapolis is right I think the 9th to the 13th.

Mr. Elhard: — 6th to the 9th, isn't it?

Mr. Kasperski: — 6th to the 9th?

Mr. Addley: — But that is the second week. The 6th to the 12th. Depends what you are calling the second week.

The Chair: — Could I suggest that maybe what we do is we just adjourn this meeting and then have some, just check our calendars and . . . (inaudible) . . . agenda.

Mr. McMorris: — Each caucus come up with some dates.

Mr. Kasperski: — Yes. I think that . . . a good idea.

The Chair: — I think that would work best. That sounds good. I'll accept the motion to adjourn. Mr. Prebble. All those in favour. Agreed.

The committee adjourned at 11:30 a.m.