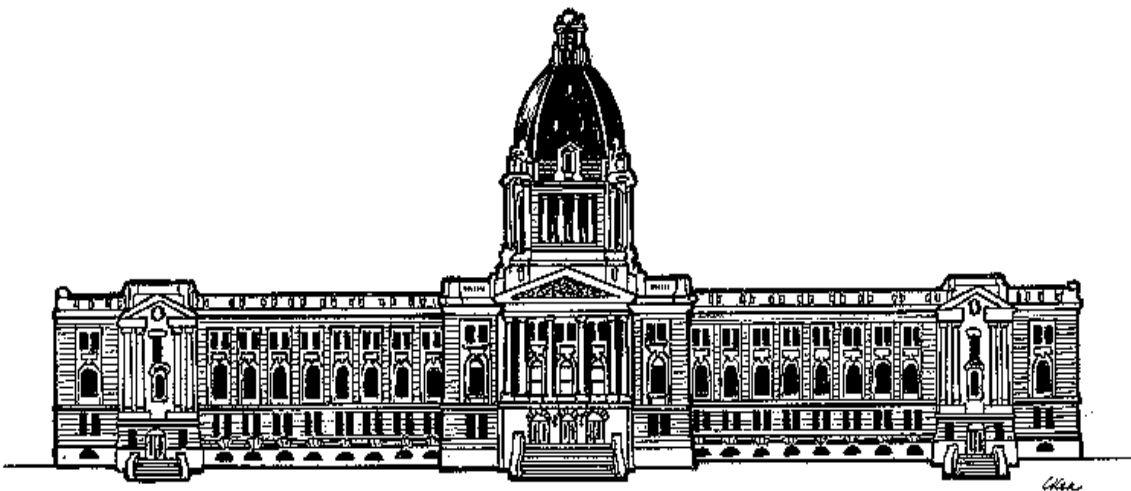




STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
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Rosetown-Elrose

Ms. Joanne Crofford, Deputy Chair
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Lon Borgerson
Saskatchewan Rivers

Mr. Ken Cheveldayoff
Saskatoon Silver Springs

Mr. Michael Chisholm
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Andy Iwanchuk
Saskatoon Fairview

Mr. Kim Trew
Regina Coronation Park

[The committee met at 10:30]

Public Hearing: Special Report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Regarding Maximizing the Effectiveness of Public Accounts Committees

The Chair: — Good morning everyone. I'll call the Public Accounts Committee meeting to order. We do not have an agenda like we would normally have for Public Accounts. This is a special day for our committee.

As you know, the purpose of the Public Accounts Committee is to provide scrutiny of government. Very rarely does this committee provide scrutiny of itself. And this morning we have an opportunity to do some of that, led by a very capable person from an organization that has focused on the process of scrutiny, public accountability, the work of auditors general across Canada. And recently they have spent a fair bit of time and done a major project on reviewing the work of Public Accounts to try to determine where they're effective and perhaps where improvement could be made.

I'm very pleased to welcome to our committee Mr. Geoff Dubrow who is the director of capacity development. And I think we all think we can improve our capacity to serve and to develop the work of Public Accounts Committee. So we're very pleased to have Mr. Dubrow with us. He arrived yesterday. He has been getting grounded on the functioning of our committee and generally the processes used by the legislature here in the province of Saskatchewan. He has a few meetings besides the one with the Public Accounts Committee, but the primary focus of his visit is to meet with this committee and to not only make a presentation to us but to entertain I think a very . . . hopefully will be a very positive dialogue.

I've invited the Provincial Auditor to join us for this meeting because we work hand in glove with the Provincial Auditor in the work that we do. And normally, Mr. Wendel, you don't speak until you're spoken to. But this morning I would like to change that and certainly suggest that if you have questions or comments, feel free to interject and take every opportunity to participate fully with your thoughts and ideas. Because I think we would value your input in that regard as well.

So, Mr. Dubrow, I don't have your CV [curriculum vitae] in front of me, but if you want to say just a little bit about your past and your work with the CCAF, then we'll . . . We know you have a slide presentation for us. We'll let you get into that. And we always like to maintain considerable amount of time for members to question because I think that's when the most useful information is achieved. So welcome again to Saskatchewan, and we give you the floor.

Mr. Dubrow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate on behalf of my executive director, Michael Eastman, the invitation to be here today to talk to your Public Accounts Committee. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Mr. Wendel. I think it's great that the legislative auditor is present for this meeting. CCAF is funded in part by the legislative audit community. That is one of our main constituencies, and we certainly appreciate all the support we get from CCOLA [Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors]

and from Mr. Wendel. So we're very glad that he's attending as well.

A bit of background about myself — some previous political work as a minister's aide in the last federal government, which I think is very important that people who are working closely with members of parliament . . . And of course my function is completely non-partisan but very important to understand the kinds of information that members of parliament need to do their job. And sometimes that's . . . Having had the opportunity to work on Parliament Hill and work for a minister, I think you get a sense of members of parliament and ministers as the audience and the kinds of messages that they need in order to function and do their job.

Prior to that I spent about 10 years, and the last six of them at a particular organization, doing the kind of work that I'm doing here, internationally in countries in which Public Accounts Committees are not yet set up and in nascent democracies in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. So one example of that was we set up a Public Accounts Committee in the Russian parliament and helped the Russian Auditor General develop value-for-money expertise.

So it's very nice to be doing this now in my own country, in what is a developed democracy. But as you can imagine, I think — I've talked about this in other presentations as well — one of the challenges is that yes, we live in a developed democracy, one of the democracies that's probably the most respected in the world. But at the same time our system of oversight is probably the most dependent on Public Accounts Committees, on parliament, on the legislature for it to function.

There are really three . . . And I don't intend to go into any detail whatsoever. But there are really three predominant oversight models in the world. One of them is the Westminster system, which of course is ours. The other is the French *cours des comptes* [auditor's office] in which the auditor is actually part of the judicial system, the judicial branch. And so they have their own powers and their own enforcement powers, which of course our auditors do not have. And then there's a board model which is used in a lot of Asian countries in which the Auditor General still relies on parliament for follow-up, but at the same time they can contact ministries directly if there are violations in financial audits.

So it's really in our system in which the Auditor General and provincial auditors are entirely dependent on the Public Accounts Committee for follow-up. And so that of course makes your role an essential one.

There are so many contingencies upon which the success of a Public Accounts Committee depends. The electoral cycle — the closer we get to an election, sometimes the Public Accounts Committees in general don't tend to function in as non-partisan way.

Electoral landslides — British Columbia, the last Legislative Assembly with only two opposition members, the Public Accounts Committee in essence ground to a halt.

The nature of the issue being examined — the more

controversial the issue, the more difficult it is for the Public Accounts Committee to issue unanimous reports and work effectively.

The extent of turnover of committee members and the extent to which there is a commitment on the part of the PAC [Public Accounts Committee] to follow-up on its own recommendations and see that they've been implemented.

So there are some challenges in the Westminster system for the effective functioning of a PAC. And what we've done is some research, and I believe you've all received a copy of this guide. It's called *Parliamentary Oversight - Committees and Relationships: A Guide to Strengthening Public Accounts Committees*.

A member of the committee prior was just mentioning, prior to this presentation, was just mentioning that someone from CCAF was here last year and presented some of the results of the survey. And the next step is for us to unveil — and we've done this at CCPAC, the Canadian Council for Public Accounts Committees, as well as at the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee — our draft strategy for how to maximize the effectiveness of Public Accounts Committees. And really that strategy — and that's what I'd like to go into detail on — really draws on our findings and our studies. So I'll refer back to some of the findings from that study as we go through.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of your suggestion about leaving time, I'd like to do it one step further and actually suggest that I pause after each.

There are five phases to the strategy. I'll sort of keep my eye on the time to make sure we get through all five. But I'd be very happy to entertain questions because really my job the way I see it as a presenter here is to facilitate discussion between the committee rather than to monopolize the committee's time with my own presentation.

So without further ado I'd ask you just to, Margaret, to skip to one slide further. And this is our draft strategy that we've developed for maximizing the effectiveness of Public Accounts Committees. Again this is something that we presented in September at the CCPAC meeting, the annual meeting. And as you see, there are five phases to the strategy. And each phase as you go lower down is dependent upon the previous one.

So we start by suggesting that there are some preconditions that need to be in place for a Public Accounts Committee to be effective. One of them is that, we suggest, is an opposition Chair, which tends to be . . . I mean every province in Canada has that except the two territories that have a non-partisan system of government.

But there are others that I'd like to get into with you. And these are really the basics, the basic fundamentals that really talk to the importance of getting certain things in place before the committee can go off and do some of the work that it'd like to do and be as effective as possible.

The second stage is setting a non-partisan objective and planning. And the chairman and I had a discussion about this issue yesterday, and he suggested the term constructive

partisanship. And I think that's very right, that we've been called naive in the past, and we were . . . It's on record in the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons for using the word non-partisan. How can you be non-partisan in a partisan place?

But what our survey has found and our study has found is that the more non-partisan the committee, the more effective it is. One only has to look at the sponsorship hearings at the federal level to see how a committee can break down when an issue either that's being considered by the Public Accounts Committee either threatens the government's re-election or the opposition smells the chance to take power. And so we found that the more non-partisan the issue, the more effective a Public Accounts Committee is.

Staying with the same phase, we talk about planning being very important. We suggest that there needs to be a consensus in committee, and the planning process needs to be influenced by that, that the role of the committee is to deal with issues that help to strengthen public administration in the province. And that's a goal that tends to be one that can be fairly non-partisan in its orientation, although of course partisanship will always sneak into the process or could. And again, I'll go through these issues in detail as we go slide by slide.

Phase 3 is holding an effective hearing. And I apologize. This is not the first time I've done this. I see that I still have the word MPs [Member of Parliament] here. And of course I've now opened myself up to criticism for being an Ottawa boy who's being insensitive in terms of not having changed that. And I apologize for that. It should say MPP [Member of Provincial Parliament]/MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]/MNA [Member of the National Assembly]/MPs, which would cover all the parliamentarians in Canada.

But the importance of parliamentarians or legislators asking pertinent questions during meetings very much depends on the planning process, very much depends on that non-partisan goal and objective being set.

Looking back, Mr. Chairman, to CCPAC, to the meeting, I remember the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons being on record talking about his frustration with members often coming in unprepared for meetings, not having read the briefing notes, not really being ready to have a discussion. And so the importance of those pertinent questions really depends on an effective planning process. I'd be very interested to hear your perception of this — the members of the committee's perception on this.

Again sticking with holding an effective hearing, phase 3, which is the role of witnesses, how witnesses are regarded by the committee.

And some PACs have a very antagonistic relationship with some witnesses. Some other PACs, like the Quebec public administration committee as it's called there, feel that they've managed to maintain a cordial relationship with witnesses. And obviously the greater the extents of the tension between witnesses and members of the committee, the more frustrating it is for the members of the committee and the less information they tend to get. Words like stonewalling and muddying the

waters are some of the terms that I've heard in the last little while.

And so I'd be very interested to get a sense of whether you feel that generally the relationship between the committee and the relationship between witnesses is cordial in the sense that you're getting the information that you need from them and feel that they're partners in the process.

Looking at phase 4 — I think this is a very, very important phase — adding value. We talk about the importance of the committee, committee reports. What is the value added? When you go back to your constituencies and you talk to members . . . and I understand that members will not swarm you and say, well tell us about your work on the Public Accounts Committee. But nonetheless what can you tell your constituents about the value added of being on the PAC?

And here I'd like to offer some sympathy or empathy because clearly from having talked to members in other committees, it's very clear that it's in a sense easier to relate to your constituents the work you've done on a legislative committee, the transport committee, the number of highways that were built by the new law that you helped pass, the critical amendments that you contributed to that law than it is to explain to members what you've done on Public Accounts, in which the issues tend to be much more technical. And because sometimes they are non-partisan, also there is not . . . it's a little harder to explain politically what you're done and what the impact is. And so I think that's the reason why we've gotten a fair amount of interest from members in terms of helping committees to relate what their value-added is in the process.

For example, is Public Accounts Committee getting, when they get the reports of the Auditor General, are they endorsing all the recommendations or are they going above and beyond that and perhaps making some of their own recommendations? Are they conducting some of their own studies and are they ensuring that the recommendations that they themselves have passed and sent to the government are being implemented by the government?

And that's a frustration in some PACs on the part of some legislated auditors in other parts of the country, that sometimes that's not happening. That the Auditor General will report to the PAC; PAC will issue its recommendations but then there'll be no follow-up to see if those recommendations have been implemented. So again that's all about the value-added.

Finally, communicating that value-added to the public and to the media, because what we're suggesting is that the easier it is for members of the PAC to communicate that value-added to the media and to the public, the more incentive they'll have to participate in the process and the more incentive they'll have to . . . and the more rewarding an experience it will be for members of that committee. So that's in a sense our draft strategy.

My suggestion would be that I go through the first phase of that strategy and then pause at that point to take questions.

So as we get into each individual phase of the strategy, we're borrowing from the framework that was established in the oversight manual that we developed. And you'll see that

repeatedly through each phase of the strategy there are three categories; that is, we're looking at the framework and the powers and practices of each committee, the capacity to exercise committee powers, and then strong committee leadership.

So I'm going to start by going through what we call the laying the foundation, the preconditions for an effective Public Accounts Committee. And I'll touch on some of the findings along the way that we have come . . . that have come out of our PAC survey.

So for example I'll start with, under defined frameworks of powers and practices, the power to meet outside the legislature session. We found that all Public Accounts Committees have the ability to meet when the legislature is not sitting, but only two-thirds of the committees have the power to meet when the House is prorogued.

The power of initiating inquiries. We have suggested that that is one of the prerequisites; that is that, can the PAC initiate its own studies? Can the PAC look into issues above and beyond the information that's being provided by the legislative auditor. We found that about three-quarters of legislatures have the right to look at issues that have not been specifically referred to it by the House. So they can in effect initiate their own studies.

Regular and frequent meetings is another very important one. There are several PACs . . . There's one that is featured in the news today, suggesting that certain PACs never meet. So we asked whether regular or frequent meetings were held. And about 10 of the 14 Public Accounts Committees — that is the 10 provincial, the federal, and three territorial — about 10 of them feel that they do hold meetings on a regular basis.

Under the capacity to exercise the committee's powers, 11 of the 14 PACs felt that they had adequate financing. But, and I think this is a statistic that I've mentioned at CCPAC, Mr. Chairman, 6 out of 14 legislatures or PACs have no research support. And we would suggest that that is an issue that in those provinces in which there is no research support, that's an issue that we certainly would be happy to engage a dialogue with. Certainly if you look at other political systems, the congressional system, we recognize that our parliamentary and legislative system tends to put less of an emphasis on committees. And therefore committee support is often weaker than in congressional systems.

But I think it's important to mention that if the PAC ever wants to engage in its own studies, it's very important to have its own legislative support — that is research support. And this doesn't necessarily mean the researcher goes out and investigates an issue in lieu of the auditor general — certainly not. But on some larger governance issues, for example, we're doing something on performance reporting in British Columbia right now. So on a governance issue, it's very important to have that research support at your disposal.

Finally — and I'll take that pause that I've promised you — under strong committee leadership, about 12 of the PACs feel that there's a strong co-operative relationship between the Public Accounts Committee and legislative auditor. And of course that is something that in our system is absolutely

essential because the PAC really is dependent on the auditor, on the legislative auditor for information.

So let me pause at that point, having presented the first slide. And if there are any questions about some of the issues I've just raised, I'd be delighted to talk to you about them.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Dubrow. And just to lay the basis for those questions. With regards to the points you mentioned, our committee does have the power to call meetings. And we do have the power to meet outside the legislature session. We do not have the power to initiate inquiries — unless we are so designated by the Legislative Assembly — outside of the Provincial Auditor's reports and the Public Accounts.

We have not always had regular and frequent meetings but our track record as of late is pretty good. And I would be open to members suggesting whether they feel there's sufficient time allocated to hearings. I would guess that sometimes there is and sometimes there isn't depending on the issue, which is hard to predict.

We do not have independent research capability and no finances for that. And the AG [Auditor General] reports are permanently referred to our committee. So that's just the basis. And colleagues, Ms. Crofford.

Ms. Crofford: — My question is when you use the word inquiry, I always get the visual of the American system which tend to get pretty, pretty extensive and absorb huge amounts of time and resources and whatnot. And what my question is, is do you find the inquiry process where it exists, now I'm talking inquiry beyond the normal calling of people to the committee and whatnot, does it tend to make the process more political or less political?

Mr. Dubrow: — Thank you very much for the question. And I'd just like to take the opportunity to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Vice-Chair of the committee. We will be talking a bit later about the important role that a Chair and Vice-Chair play in the committee and would certainly be happy to talk to you about that at any other time at your convenience as well.

I think you're right that the word inquiry, and I was borrowing that from the PAC guy, but the word inquiry, it also sort of elicits ideas of maybe rather a sort of aggressive witch hunt. I think what we were talking about more was studies the committee can undertake.

I'll give you an example. Right now in the Public Accounts Committee in the House of Commons, they don't tend to undertake a lot of separate studies, if you like. And I think that study is really the word that we want rather than inquiry. But they're looking now at the relationship between Treasury Board and parliament and looking at under the accountability Act, the new rule of deputy ministers as accounting officers. So there are larger governance issues. There was a discussion in June in the House of Commons' Public Accounts Committee that I attended in which that very issue was raised and saying, look we're not going to send a researcher to Montreal to investigate a scandal, that's not the purpose of the House initiating it's own

inquiries.

My suggestion would be that we'll replace the word inquiry with study, but my suggestion would be that generally the more non-partisan the issue when it's related to an issue of broader significance in the province in terms of governance. And I'll give you an example, public performance reporting. Something that we're looking at doing with the British Columbia Public Accounts Committee. Those are the kind of enquiries that I'm making reference to.

Ms. Crofford: — So you're speaking more to things that strengthen the policy and process structure around governance so that accountability is built into the system.

Mr. Dubrow: — That's right. And that the legislature has a voice in not only responding to the legislative auditor's reports — which is an essential part of its role — but also a voice in strengthening the accountability system. Thank you.

The Chair: — Are there other questions on this? Mr. Borgerson.

Mr. Borgerson: — Just looking at this page, power to initiate enquiries. You say three quarters of the PACs indicate that they have the right. I suspect that most of them don't exercise it.

Mr. Dubrow: — Well I was thinking about that before I came here this morning, which was that we don't actually have . . . And I'd like to make the offer that if the committee is interested, we will look into it and get back to you. You're right. We have statistics on . . . In theory they can do it. In practice we don't know.

Certainly as I mentioned, I mentioned some examples the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, the BC [British Columbia] Public Accounts Committee is looking at doing some work in that area. But we don't have statistics on that. And if the committee's interested, I would be actually quite pleased to survey the other PACs and say, okay, what kind of other studies are you initiating? You know, over the last, let's say, the life of the last two legislatures, how many studies have you initiated above and beyond the work of the legislative auditor, and get back to you on that.

The Chair: — If I can interject . . . Sorry, Mr. Borgerson. It might be good also to get a response from those committees as to whether they felt that that strengthened and improved their role or whether . . . Did it change their role? Or was their impact positive or negative?

Because I would say — and, colleagues, correct me if I'm not speaking on your behalf — but I say that in Saskatchewan we are kind of in a box. We deal with the, with no disrespect to the auditor, but we deal primarily with the auditor's reports and have not launched to my knowledge, at least in recent times, ever into any other areas.

If we were to do that, would that change the nature of our committee? Would we take on new characteristics, a new personality? Would it strengthen us or would it defract — if that's the correct word — would there be a defraction of our role?

Sorry. Mr. Borgerson?

Mr. Borgerson: — Well in other words, the Provincial Auditor keeps us very busy here with his reports and doesn't leave us much time for . . . But of course we have requested of the Provincial Auditor special investigations on particular issues which adds to our workload as well.

In response to Mr. Hermanson's question regarding sufficient time, I think we do the best we can in terms of allotting time. And sometimes it's enough and sometimes it simply, simply isn't because of the issues that arise.

I noticed on the capacity survey — I'll mention it now — that you ask if we have . . . if the committee has adequate personnel assigned to it and then in brackets, research personnel and clerk. I think probably that should be divided up. Of course we have superb support from the Clerk and very little research capacity. So I would divide that up.

The last comment I would make just referring back to the role of MLAs, and I mean I think you've expressed that very well. It's very difficult to find the time to do the research for this committee when in fact our first priority is our constituency and the issues that come out of our constituency. And like you said there aren't a lot of kudos you get for your work in Public Accounts. It's important work but we tend to focus more on the other work. So those are challenges for us. Thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Cheveldayoff.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you. Just following up on the research component, and I know this came up in Charlottetown at the conference we were at. Can you just comment on your knowledge of different research services that are provided to PACs across the country?

Mr. Dubrow: — Well generally the model that Canadian legislatures and the federal parliament tend to follow is the Legislative Library model, the Library of Parliament model. Again if you look at a congressional system . . .

Well I'll give you an example just for fun. When I was working a lot with the Russian parliament, the way the research services would work there would be that after an election the Chairman of the Duma of each committee would be chosen. That Chairman would choose a chief of staff and the chief of staff would go out and hire people. The budget committee of the state Duma has 50 employees working for it.

We don't tend to follow that model as you know. The model that we tend to follow is . . . Because of the fact that traditionally in our system committees play a weaker role because of the majority government issue, what tends to happen is that you have an independent Legislative Library which will provide research services. So if I look at . . . being from Ottawa I look at the federal model.

The Library of Parliament, which is a stand-alone entity which serves both the House of Commons and the Senate, each committee will be assigned someone — one or two people from the Legislative Library, from the Library of Parliament — who will then provide those research services, usually on a part-time

basis. So that tends to be the model that we follow. Ontario also uses that model.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Okay. Any other provinces that you can comment on?

Mr. Dubrow: — Those that have research capacity, and again that tends to be the model. Really what varies — and I don't have statistics on that; I could certainly look into it — but what tends to vary is the extent of the research support, whether or not there is research provided. Even at the federal level now with the two research they have there . . . the two researchers they have, it's becoming pretty clear that if they want to do anything else above and beyond what they're doing now, they're going to need more assistance, more support.

The Chair: — Thank you. British Columbia also has a researcher, part-time researcher assigned to their PAC committee.

Mr. Dubrow: — That's right. That's right.

The Chair: — Colleagues, are we ready to go on to the next section? Mr. Dubrow.

Mr. Dubrow: — So going to the next phase of this strategy which is phase two — a non-partisan objective or constructive partisan objective . . . or constructive non-partisan objective and planning. Again our study found, or our PAC guide found that committees tend to work most efficiently, most effectively, when the issue they're looking at is a non-partisan one.

My own personal view on this is that the more an issue affects the re-electability of the government, or the more the opposition sees it as an opportunity to use an issue to remove the current government in the next election, the less effective the Public Accounts Committee will be. Because the more political the issue, the harder it is for it to function.

We certainly emphasize here the importance of strong committee leadership. And I think that here we talk about the role of the Chair, but the role of the Vice-Chair is also very important. Obviously the role of the Chair and in liaisoning with his or her opposition members and the role of the Vice-Chair are the sort of principal liaison to the government members.

The importance of setting that non-partisan objective and making sure that members, when they wander off — not to suggest that parliamentarians ever meander off the subject — but if it happens from time to time, the role of the Chair in reminding members why they're there is very important. And I emphasize that partly because some Public Accounts Committees interestingly enough meet right after question period. So how do you take the most political period of the day when members are in the Chamber and the spin war is happening and then come into a committee which is supposed to be completely non-partisan? What happens when you have substitutes sitting on the committee who don't realize that, you know . . . oh, gee, well I thought this was just an extension of what we did in the Chamber. So the role of the Chair in reminding members I think we found is very important.

Obviously the agreement of the government and their commitment to focus on accountability of public servants and of administrative and financial operations rather than on political accountability of ministers is very important. And I'll come to that issue right away. We found generally, and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association finds generally, that ministers as members of the committee is not a good idea. Ministers as witnesses is not a good idea because what happens of course is that you fall back according to partisan lines when both happen.

Ministers generally are barred, not necessarily in statute, but often by convention. So ministers don't tend to be members of committees unless for some reason the government's majority is very small and it's required that a minister sit on a committee. But generally ministers are barred as members on committees.

Another issue that we talk about that's very important for the non-partisan objective and the planning objective is continuity. We found that only about half the Chairs — eight out of the fourteen Chairs — are there for the duration of the legislature. And nine of the fourteen PACs have members there for the full duration of the legislature. That's not even getting into the issue of substitutions, which we can talk about in a moment, but turnover on a Public Accounts Committee. Public Accounts Committee tends to be treated like any other legislative committee but it's not. It's a very specific role as you all know.

Mr. Chairman, I understand you had tenure on the committee since the very beginning. And I'm sure you would empathize with anybody who would come in midstream into a role like that. Because from what I've heard from other chairmen, there are skills that one learns along the way and a very specific knowledge of how to run a PAC that a new Chair might find difficult and challenging midstream to deal with. So one of the issues that we find, I think we find very important, is continuity of members. It takes a while to get used to working on a PAC. A PAC is not an ordinary legislative committee. It's a scrutiny committee and there are particular skills that are required in order to function on them.

A similar issue is — and it's a little bit off topic but I think it's been raised in almost every meeting that I've attended similar to this one — is the issue about continuity of deputy ministers. It's equally frustrating for the Public Accounts Committee where there's a great turnover of deputy ministers on an annual . . . or every 15 or 16 months to be able to hold deputy ministers accountable for their actions. Because you'll call a deputy minister, you get a report. By the time the PAC gets around to hearing it, you call the deputy minister and the deputy minister will say, well I'm sorry, that's not my file. I was actually deputy minister of so-and-so and I've only come aboard recently. So I just mention that because the continuity issue I think is a major theme around Canada. And it doesn't only relate to the continuity of the members, but also the continuity of the bureaucracy.

I'll just . . . There's a second slide, Margaret, on partisan . . . non-partisan objective and planning. And then I'll take that pause.

About 10 of the committees have . . . actually prepare agendas. Mr. Chairman, I heard you start your meeting by saying that

this particular one won't, but usually you do have agendas. About 10 of the 14 committees prepare agendas and briefing, some kind of briefing notes in advance for the members of the committee. But only half of them have steering committees or subcommittees that are involved in planning, and that's . . . When I saw that statistic, that caught my eye.

Again we emphasize the importance of planning in . . . of a committee really planning out its hearings and identifying its objectives. And that's something that, when we noticed that only about 7 of the 14 committees have a subcommittee or steering committee to plan, I think there was a little bit of interest in working on that area.

So that's phase two of the strategy, and I'll be glad again to pause and take questions.

The Chair: — All right. And just before I go to Mr. Borgerson, thank you, Mr. Dubrow. There has been some turnover . . . I'll just hit on a couple of issues. There has been some turnover on this committee. You're correct. My colleagues have been stuck with me as a Chair ever since the last election. I believe prior to this last election there was a change in Chair partway through, but I'm not positive of that. And if there was, it would have been my fault because the Leader of the Opposition was myself, and I would have determined who the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee was. So if there was a fault, it would lie with me.

We do not usually have ministers — although there have been ministers that have been subbed in on the odd occasion I believe, but it is rare — as members. I don't believe, Madam Clerk, they are barred. I don't think they're barred from serving on our committee, but they don't serve as regular members as a rule.

We do have agendas. Those agendas are prepared in consultation between myself and the Vice-Chair of the committee, but we do not as a rule bring briefing notes unless those briefing notes are sent to the committee ahead of time by the witnesses. But of course we do use the auditor's report as a substitute for our briefing notes. And I think most of my colleagues are fairly diligent at reviewing those chapters before we deal with the subject matter.

Because at the current time there are only two parties represented in our legislature, we don't have a steering committee as such. But the Vice-Chair and myself do meet informally on regular occasions, and the former Vice-Chair and I did the same to deal with, you know, the structural and administrative matters of the committee.

Just on the issue of partisanship. I guess we'd be kidding ourselves — and I think I speak for both government members and opposition members — if we didn't recognize the fact that government members want scrutiny. But they don't want that scrutiny to get to the point where it may find something that could somehow tarnish the government of whom they are associated with. And I think it's also fair to say that the opposition members want scrutiny. But if they don't find anything that they think is of political value, they question whether that exercise was worth their time. I think that is a natural outflow of what occurs.

And I don't know if I'm stealing Mr. Borgerson's thunder here and if he wants to comment on that, but at some point, Mr. Dubrow, if you could outline to the committee how we can harness those two objectives in a constructive way that the total outcome of the Public Accounts Committee — recognizing those realities — is still constructive, that we still do our work of scrutiny regardless of the outcome in the most constructive way possible. And with that comment, I will give the floor to Mr. Borgerson while you're contemplating.

Mr. Borgerson: — Well I think that . . . I mean we have in terms of the Chair had the advantage of continuity through this session. But even more than that I think, Mr. Hermanson, you've had experience, previous experience on Public Accounts as well, if I'm not mistaken. No?

The Chair: — No, I was a rookie as a member of Public Accounts.

Mr. Borgerson: — Yes. Yes.

The Chair: — Not a rookie as being involved in committee work.

Mr. Borgerson: — Yes. But I will certainly echo what you've said about the importance of continuity. I don't think we've ever had ministers substitute in during this session. It's always been private members. And I think that that's a good practice.

We have in one case, you know, grappled with the question of asking ministers to appear as witnesses. And I agree with your assessment in that as soon as you do that, it absolutely and definitely becomes question period all over again. In fact I hadn't heard that story before, that there is a jurisdiction where they have Public Accounts meetings directly after question period. I can't imagine what that would be like.

We do have critics, opposition critics, appear to ask questions. And that is, from my perspective, that is on the one sense problematic because they don't sit on the committee and aren't sort of tuned in to the culture, which isn't totally non-partisan but it's as non-partisan as we can make it. So the tone will sometimes change with the critic in place.

On the other hand, that speaks as well to the research shortcomings of this committee where, in fact, opposition members don't have the knowledge, the background knowledge, and rely on that opposition of that critic to come in and ask the right questions. And so it's very understandable that they appear. At the same time there is that difficulty, right, between the research capability plus the partisanship that might then occur. I think that's it. That's just a comment that I wanted to add to what you said.

Mr. Dubrow: — Well thank you. I appreciate the comments. And it's interesting that you raised the issue about opposition critics. It has been raised in another jurisdiction and I think you've nicely summed up the dilemma. One is that, given the very technical issues that Public Accounts Committees consider — which will change from week to week — the role of the opposition critics can be quite useful in having someone who has gained some expertise on a particular area, an issue, participate in that discussion.

On the other hand of course the opposition critics — and this is not reflective on the opposition in general but again as part of the political process — will bring a spin element or could potentially bring a spin element. Because it's very hard to let that go at the door, to check your spin at the door, as they say. And so I think you're right that that is an issue that we should be mentioning — not only the ministers but, you know, the opposition critics as well.

Mr. Chairman, just to get back to your comment. You had asked me about how to harness the two objectives and I didn't get a chance to denote which two objectives you . . .

The Chair: — Well the objective of the government members are that scrutiny is fine unless you find something through that scrutiny that we would rather you not discuss in PAC. And the opposition's role is, scrutiny is fine but if we don't find anything then we're wasting our time in this committee. I'm being fairly blunt.

Mr. Dubrow: — Okay. Yes, now I understand. Well I would get back to the issue of finding a non-partisan issue to examine. Again an issue related to the general governance of the province, an issue that's related to accountability in the province. And I'll give you a couple of examples.

One example would be looking at the state of internal financial controls in the province. And I'm not suggesting or advocating, I'm just giving you a sense of some of the issues that might potentially be of interest to PACs. So unlikely that members of the Public Accounts Committee would want to look at the internal financial statements and spend a lot of time on them, but they might want to look at what is the state of internal financial controls in our province.

Similarly I mentioned public performance reporting. And as I said we're looking at doing something similar with British Columbia right now. Western provinces tend to be — and Saskatchewan among them — leaders in performance reporting in Canada. In your case, I think, the term is the annual service plan.

And so one of the issues I don't think tends to be very partisan — although any issue can be made into a partisan one — would be, what is the state of performance reporting in the province? I understand that in Saskatchewan you began performance reports — was it four years ago, is that right? — and adopted the CCAF principles, the nine principles for performance reporting.

But perhaps the discussion looking back and saying, well you know, how has that gone and where do we want to go next? That's not an issue that's really going to get . . . I mean, again any issue can be made into a political one, but that kind of issue can bring a committee together and have them issue recommendations to improve public administration without being overly divisive. So that would be the kinds of issues that I would suggest might be useful.

The Chair: — That partially answers my question. But the Public Accounts Committee is charged with the review of the entire government, and in our case we use the auditor's reports as the guideline or the agenda that we use. What I'm suggesting

is, suppose that, you know, we're reviewing department X of government. And there's an issue over tendering, and let's suppose we find out that tenders were improperly put out.

Then suddenly the government members want to make sure that that doesn't become a political issue, a partisan issue, whereas the opposition members, you know, say there's an injustice here. We're doing our job of scrutinizing the government, and the government members are suppressing this by not allowing us to bring motions or to take further action or to pass a motion that brings down fire and brimstone on somebody. So you have that conflict and that tension.

Now I've seen probably more so when I was in Ottawa where the government would almost have maybe in some cases self-appointed watchdogs that would be fairly critical of the government. And they didn't seem to be disciplined or get into a lot of trouble as long as they didn't cross certain lines. I mean, as long as they didn't attack, you know, people in government. They were just as astounded by the errors and, you know, they rose up in some righteousness to say, we've got to fix this.

Is there a way Public Accounts can play that role with some unanimity on both . . . unanimity is not the right word, but at least co-operation on both sides to fulfill our role of scrutiny and actually make government better and be seen to be constructive rather than be seen to be so partisan. Or is that impossible? Maybe I'm in nirvana here.

Mr. Dubrow: — No. I think you've stated the dilemma or the difficulty of having a system of accountability whereby so much of that accountability is dependent on the legislature, which is a political animal.

I was going to — at the risk of sounding facetious — going to say if I had the answer to that, I would probably be wearing an Armani suit and driving a Mercedes. But I think you've brought out the heart of the issue which is the difficulty of, on a Public Accounts Committee, of dealing with issues that either the government finds contentious or the opposition sees as a chance to score political points. I don't think there unfortunately is an easy answer to that.

The Chair: — I'm not sure if this comes up later in your report. I have read it and I just can't remember. But in the case of opposition critics, that occurs on our committee. But we have a very small committee and I would wonder if you have any comments on what the optimum size of a committee is.

We have four members from the government side who — and I think I'm not speaking incorrectly here — do not participate at length in most of the discussions we have simply because this is a scrutiny exercise and the opposition members tend to be more interested in driving the scrutiny process. So you have two members sitting on the opposition side who are the voting members of the committee. You have a Chair who can only vote in the case of a tie which, you know, in most situations will never occur when you have four to two and an opposition member's a Chair.

Our committee used to be a bit larger. I think it was . . . Was it five and four with the opposition member being a Chair? I know that I as a Chair inject myself into some of the debate

simply because oftentimes there's just too much material and there's too many angles to come at some of these things. And quite frankly I'm also inquisitive and want to know some answers to some questions myself. So any comments on optimum size and the role of the Chair in actually involving himself or herself in some of the issues?

Mr. Dubrow: — In terms of optimum size, the recommended size is five to eleven members. We mentioned that in our guide and I think that we, if I'm not mistaken, we borrowed that from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. So that's in terms of that.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, remind me of your second question. I apologize.

The Chair: — Chairmen involving themselves in the debate and . . .

Mr. Dubrow: — Right, right.

The Chair: — You know, just the opposition having enough critical mass I guess to effectively deal with the issues and the fact that the opposition . . . or the government, pardon me, often don't involve themselves in an issue because scrutiny is not perhaps their highest priority in Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Dubrow: — Right. My experience from the House of Commons PAC, watching chairmen, is that they tend to ask questions at the end. They'll chair the process in a sort of neutral fashion and then they'll wait until the questions have been posed by members and then they'll pose their own questions. That's I would say my general observation having watched that PAC function on a regular basis. I can't offer you unfortunately any other provincial experiences.

The Chair: — Mr. Cheveldayoff.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — I would just like to comment on this, Mr. Chair. I guess it's fair to say it's one sense of frustration for me and I'm sure I speak on behalf of my opposition colleagues as well, the time demands that the legislature puts on all of us. And to be frank I usually sit down the night before the meeting, read through the information, or the weekend prior, and try to pick out the salient details and ask questions on that.

When something like Health for example comes up, I'm very appreciative of the opposition critic being beside me, somebody who has that depth of knowledge and, you know, we certainly invite the critics from our side to come forward whenever possible. You know, other times we try to handle things as best we can here.

And there's often times when I'm walking back to my office after this meeting really thinking, did I do the job the best I could? You know, given the information that I had and maybe more research should have been done, maybe more . . . You know, I often have some regrets. But I guess it's fair to say that we do that with our job on a daily basis. We always wish we had more time, maybe more research but, you know, it's one of the sense of frustrations that I have on this committee.

The other one is the fact that the government has the majority

and when you think that you're getting on to something and really trying to delve into the details, you can be shut down very quickly. And, you know, maybe a year from now or two years from now, I'll be saying a different story, but from where I sit in this chair as the opposition Finance critic and a member of this committee, I do have some frustrations. I just offer that comment.

With that being said, I think we do some good work here. There's always room for improvement. I like the atmosphere in this committee. I think the Chair does a very good job and for the most part we have a good relationship on both sides here as well.

The Chair: — Ms. Crofford, did you want to comment before Mr. Dubrow responds?

Ms. Crofford: — I'm finding this a very thought-provoking discussion. So we have an auditor who goes through all the accountability processes in government as kind of a state-of-the-art kind of guy when it comes to what auditors do. Now what kind of a question might I come up with other than the actual processes and structures of accountability in government that the auditor hasn't already brought to my attention in his report?

The Chair: — That's a slightly different tack than what Mr. Cheveldayoff's was, but it's a very good question. So I think you actually will be required to give us two answers here, Mr. Dubrow.

Mr. Dubrow: — Okay. Is it getting warm in here or . . . Let me start with your question. I think the issue is more related — and of course this in no way reflects upon the experience in this province or the Provincial Auditor — but in general I think that part of the question might be whether or not you want to go further on a particular issue than the legislative auditor has.

The legislative auditor is of course an officer of the legislature. But nonetheless is there an issue that perhaps, you know, the legislative auditor has reported on, but you say, hey this is really interesting but now we've got to hold witnesses and we've got to come up with some recommendations to change the system? Okay, the legislative auditor's recommendations have been very good. But as a politician, someone who's close to my constituents, they're worried about this particular issue. Let's hold a couple of hearings on that issue and see if we can go a little bit further.

So it's not necessarily to say that there would be a blazing gap that the legislative auditor has ignored, but you might choose to look at a particular issue, you know, much deeper scope, setting out your own terms in which the legislative auditor might, in his own infinite wisdom, choose a different area. That would be more, I think, the kind of difference.

Ms. Crofford: — So for example, for a special auditor for . . . You know, because you can't look at all aspects of everything every year. Yes. Is that what you mean, something like that?

I'm just trying to get a feel for what kind of thing you mean. The reason is, having been a minister, I've always felt quite thoroughly beaten up by the auditor so I never really felt a need

to look for more trouble. But . . .

The Chair: — You're still on good speaking terms though.

Ms. Crofford: — Anyway, I'll just leave it at that.

Mr. Dubrow: — Thank you very much. I'd come back with a more general statement, which would be again that the legislative auditor . . . Well let me actually approach this a different way. Let me talk a bit about the work that we're doing in the area of performance reporting.

And again this is the last time I'll say this disclaimer, it's typical Canadian politesse, but this no way reflects the experience in this particular province but in general what I've seen across the country. There are places where the auditor general will look at performance reporting to the extent to which the province's performance reports are readable, usable, and they'll evaluate them. But the legislative auditor will do that from the point of view of his or her own experience. It's a very different thing for members of a committee to say . . . And again I'm sorry. I apologize. This in no way reflects anything in Saskatchewan, but typical Canadian apologetic.

But members, what we found in our work on performance reports is that they don't reflect the perspective of the user, of legislators. The legislators don't use them.

So for the Public Accounts Committee to say, you know what, we're going to look at this issue in detail and we're going to take those reports and we're going to go through them and we're going to, in a completely non-partisan way, ask the departmental officials . . . And I just realized that there are some sitting right behind me who work up performance reportings so I'm feeling some heat on my back right now. But for them to engage in a constructive dialogue on that issue and say, look, we've looked through these reports, you know. We appreciate your effort. But from the perspective of the user, these are things that we really are finding . . . We need more information on this. We need more information on that.

That might be the kind of thing that . . . The legislative auditor will have one set of experiences, but a politician is really a unique — I was going to say beast, but that's probably not the right word, right? — a unique individual. I mean . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Creature, thank you. Creature.

So I think one of the things that's really missing in our system, to be perfectly honest, is the voice of the legislature in accountability. And the government's supposed to be accountable to the legislature, but the legislatures rarely speak out — and that should be the Public Accounts Committee if at all — rarely speak out on how they want to see the system changed.

And so when you meet with bureaucrats who are generally very interested in doing a good job and feeling that they made a positive contribution, you tend to hear people saying, well we really haven't heard much from the legislature. We don't really know what they want. And that's why I would emphasize that the Public Accounts Committee, when it comes to accountability issues, really is the voice of the legislature — or potentially can be. You have the power to make statements of

saying, look, you know, our accountability system is great but we really feel that you need X, Y, and Z in order to improve it. And that's what I would say is that unique perspective as a politician that you can bring to the process.

Sorry about the long answer.

The Chair: — Just before you — if you can remember — before you respond to Mr. Cheveldayoff's comments . . .

Mr. Dubrow: — I've got that one written down.

The Chair: — One thing that I find frustrating is the fact that we tend to limit ourselves to the auditor's reports and the auditor — and you and I discussed this actually briefly yesterday — the auditor really doesn't have a mandate to evaluate performance, say in the province of Saskatchewan vis-à-vis other provinces.

Now I know departments have that, do fulfill that function. And we as a PAC committee can actually, you know, interrogate our witnesses about how do we stack up against other provinces. But often I find the information to be pretty incomplete and there's a real reluctance to start to compare because — particularly amongst auditors — because there's never apples and apples. I mean everything . . . I mean we have programs to encourage entrepreneurs in the northern part of our province. Well do they have similar programs in Manitoba or northern Ontario or northern Quebec? And you know, does their program work better than our program?

We as a PAC never are able to evaluate performance on that basis. And to me that's a wonderful measuring stick, you know. I want to, you know, being I guess a sports guy I want to know where we are in the standings. Are, you know, we going to make the playoffs or not? And I find frustration in PAC that we often know that the auditor can evaluate us based on accounting principles, but I don't know where we are in the standings.

Mr. Dubrow: — I think that's a good point. And I haven't forgotten your comment; I'll get to that right away. I think that's a good point. I think what we see at the CCAF is a real demand among the provinces for best practices research. Now that's not quite the same thing in the sense that I think there are some sensitivities between provinces, in province X saying yes, we're doing this better than province Y but not as good as province Z, right? But at the same time there is certainly a demand.

Again I'll go back to performance reporting. We're getting several requests from governments for best practices research on performance reporting. Well what are other people doing? And certainly committees with legislative assistants or research assistants, that would be the kind of thing that the Public Accounts Committee might say, look, we didn't get that information from the legislative audit report but we would certainly like to look into that ourselves to get some ideas of what are some other possibilities. I think you're right; that is definitely an area that . . .

In terms of your question, I actually want to return with a question. Do members of both parties receive . . . I don't know, maybe this is too sensitive a question. But in some legislatures

the caucus support services, if you want to call it that, will provide a list of suggested questions for members to ask during a hearing so that members will come . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, so the opposition, the Leader of the Opposition office has staff or the government caucus has a certain amount of support staff. And they will often prepare suggested, you know, suggested questions for members to use in the process.

And I don't know if that's something that's confidential — and if it is, feel free not to answer it — but that's certainly I think one way to get some guidance on . . . You know, you might consider asking the following questions in PAC; I've read the legislative auditor's report and my suggestion is that you ask the following questions that might serve as a useful guide.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — We do have opposition caucus staff and the government has caucus research staff as well, so we have those. But you know, certainly when you're sitting in the legislature, the demands on those individuals are very substantial as well.

Mr. Dubrow: — Sure.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — And you know in my comments earlier, I tend to be pretty hard on myself and look for the things we didn't cover or didn't go far enough on as opposed to the ones we actually did.

Mr. Dubrow: — Sure.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — And one thing I didn't comment on too was the turnover of deputy ministers. I think 18 months is the average duration of a deputy minister in our province, and sometimes you can be going back, you know, four or five years and over the tenures of two or three deputy ministers. But I guess that's just the nature of the game and I would suspect that that's probably similar in other jurisdictions as well.

Mr. Dubrow: — I don't have enough information to say yes. It's certainly the case in the federal level and the Gomery report actually made reference I believe to the issue of it's hard to hold deputy ministers accountable when their tenure is I think 12 to 15 months or something like that.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Many times when we've asked questions about . . . to deputy ministers and they say, well I can't tell you what happened then, but I can tell you from the beginning when I started nine months ago, everything's going to change and this is the way it's going to be. So you take them at your word but when that department comes up again you've probably got a 50 per cent chance of the same deputy minister being there.

Mr. Dubrow: — There was an example in one jurisdiction recently where there had been a public inquiry. And I don't believe it was a PAC, I believe it was the legislative committee called the deputy minister responsible who admitted he hadn't read the recommendations of the public inquiry because he had moved on and was no longer responsible for that department.

The Chair: — Ms. Crofford.

Ms. Crofford: — Yes. I think this is an example of some

objectives running head-on into others because I know that one of the reasons why deputies are changed is so you get people with a more integrated view of government. So they're not just in their little tube working vertically up and down the system.

But the other issue is, as a minister it doesn't matter who was the minister before, once you're the minister, the year that you receive the auditor's report you're responsible. You can't pass the buck back to the last minister. You are accountable for what happens during your tenure in that job in the same way a deputy is. So to me that's just clarifying for people what the job is. You don't get out of being accountable because you weren't there. You're the CEO [chief executive officer] of that corporation and you're accountable for, you know, maybe not from a being jailed point of view but you're responsible for its history and its knowledge and for its future continuance, in my view.

Mr. Dubrow: — I don't want to seem like I'm avoiding the issue, but I'm just noting the time and noting. . . My only comment would be at this point would be that I think that's a issue, when you look at ministerial responsibility that's a larger issue in Canadian politics right now that's being examined is the extent of ministerial accountability from previous actions.

Holding an effective hearing, phase 3 of the strategy. Here I think I'll skip this slide. It just really again talks about the importance of the role of the Chair, and I'd add the Vice-Chair, in keeping the process as non-partisan as possible. Sticking to the plan, reminding members of questions that might be going over the line.

The ability of committee members to make witnesses feel comfortable. There were some members at the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee that found this a little . . . Perhaps the word comfortable implied that we were going to serve tea and cookies and that is certainly not the case. I mean this is an accountability committee. But there are some committees again in which the relationship between the bureaucracy and the committee tends to be rather strained. And the result tends to be that you don't get very much in the way of answers from the bureaucracy. And there is a sense of frustration there.

And so this is our sort of subtle way of reminding members of the committee that the more non-partisan the plan, the more you stick to that plan, and the more prepared you are, one might find that the types of answers will be more open because there won't be a sense of cautiousness on the part of the bureaucracy. But again I'm not aware of the situation here. I'm just giving you a sense of that.

If you want to go to the next slide, holding an effective hearing, II. Here all committees have the power to call witnesses. But again of course they have the power to do so. Whether the committee authorizes it is a different story.

On the capacity to exercise the committee's powers, 12 of the committees have the power to send for papers and records. And we found that eight committees had the power to access cabinet documents. So I'll perhaps just flip on to the next one.

The Chair: — Could I just ask our Clerk to interject because I'm not sure. . . I know we ask for papers and we usually

receive what we ask for. But could you just outline what the powers of this committee are when it comes to requesting papers. I don't think we can, for instance, request cabinet documents, can we?

Ms. Woods: — This committee has the same power as other committees to call for a person's papers and documents. So it would depend upon what type of document the committee would want. Normally our practice is that we would, if there is something that's identified that the committee wishes to have, we would communicate with the author or the person who has it and ask for it. For the most part we are successful in taking that route.

Ultimately if there is something the committee wants that the individual is reluctant to provide, the committee could report that to the Assembly, and the Assembly itself has the power to issue a subpoena for documents. So the Assembly has a greater power to get the documents than the committee itself does, but through that the committee can receive pretty much whatever it would desire.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you. Mr. Dubrow.

Mr. Dubrow: — Thank you very much. Should I just flip on to the next slide which is phase 4 of the strategy which is issuing value-added recommendations and following up?

The Chair: — Sure.

Mr. Dubrow: — Okay. Here we found that eight of the committees have the power to report substantively to the legislature, and that 11 of the 14 replied that they have the power to require the government to respond and follow up. And I would suggest that this is an essential power because without it the accountability loop is sort of . . . doesn't get closed. If the committee can't send a report to the government and say, we need a response on this and we'll be waiting to hear what you've done, then the PAC is essentially not able to close that loop. And so I think that's something that's very important. I'd certainly be interested in knowing whether that's the case here.

Only about half the committees felt that they had follow-up process that was . . . they were happy with to determine whether action has been taken by the government to implement the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee. And I think this is an area that again talks about the weakness of our legislative or parliamentary system.

When you have frequent turnover of members of the committee . . . Now I understand in this province the legislative auditor tracks that and that is the case in other provinces as well, in many other provinces as well. But because of the . . . and I think that's important because of the . . . With the turnover of committee members, you know, you get a member on the committee, the first thing they're going to say is not, well what happened to the recommendations two years ago. They'll say okay, let's deal with what's current in the auditor's report, what's hit the media, etc., etc.

But that type of follow-up is very important — the diligence of the members of looking back and seeing what has been implemented from their own committee recommendations and

holding the government to account where recommendations have not been implemented or holding the bureaucracy to account. Put another way, communicating with them to find out why certain things haven't been done and looking at how to implement recommendations, I think is something that we found was very important.

In terms of value-added recommendations and follow-up — I'm trying to keep it short — but that's really, I think, the heart of what I was going to say. Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, if you'd like to take the questions on that, I'd be very happy to.

The Chair: — Okay, and just to do a little clarifying. We do report and the government does respond to our report. There is a time frame, isn't there? Within, is it, 90 . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 80?

Ms. Woods: — Ninety.

The Chair: — Yes. Ninety days is what I thought. We haven't issued a lot of reports. When I commenced chairing the committee, we were considerably behind and we focused on catching up. And once we had caught up, then we issued a fairly, it wasn't a long report but it was substantial in that it dealt with a lot of issues. And I would think that we're probably close to time to perhaps look at another couple of reports, perhaps on some special inquiries and again a general report.

We do rely on the auditor for the continuity and the auditor, on a regular basis, provides us with a chapter of information that shows the degree to which the recommendations have been followed. And the government members, of course, will point out that 90 per cent of the recommendations have been followed and the opposition members will point out that 10 per cent are still sadly lacking in spite of repeated calls for improvement.

Colleagues, you have again questions or comments? I think . . . Yes, Mr. Borgerson.

Mr. Borgerson: — Just a quick comment that in terms . . . I think this is, we're short of time here, but it is an important area in terms of follow-up in terms of informing the public as well. And, as you know, this is broadcast. But I can remember from the CCPAC conference this summer, a whole bunch of possibilities in terms of what Public Accounts Committees can do in terms of informing the public of our work. So I mean, I do think that's an unexplored, that's unexplored territory for us.

Mr. Dubrow: — That's a very interesting comment actually. I understand the implementation rate here is very high. I think I heard something like 80 or 90 per cent. So I would imagine there would be an eagerness to look at that issue and the public would be interested as well in the issue of the extent to which recommendations have been implemented.

Mr. Borgerson: — Just another comment that's connected to that is — and which we haven't had time to talk about today but which was a major topic of a small conference I went to in Ottawa — and that was the whole area of citizen engagement and that, in fact, our work is an important part of that, if we can connect our work and the results of our work with the public.

Mr. Dubrow: — Well I'm glad you mentioned that because I

think that's a great segue into the last phase of the strategy, which is how does the committee explain its value-added to constituents. And a lot of that has to do with the . . . I think will create incentives for members of the Public Accounts Committee to enjoy the work that they're doing on the PAC given the fact that it's sometimes quite technical. And in some Public Accounts Committees, members are not particularly motivated to be there. They would rather be on a finance committee or on a different legislative committee where they feel they can show results a little easier.

And our message is that if you are a member of a PAC it is possible to relate to constituents, potentially possible to relate to constituents the kind of work that you're doing. And I'll just talk briefly about that. And as you can imagine, we certainly got some interest from other PACs on that issue.

First of all in terms of press releases, nine of the fourteen committees, PACs, said that they do issue press releases. About six of them — and I understand yours is included in that — have televised or webcasted hearings. So those are sort of the conventional ways of doing things.

One particular Public Accounts Committee, the chairman showed me a press release that that particular Public Accounts Committee was going to issue. It had been written by research staff. And my first observation was that it didn't highlight the contribution of Public Accounts Committee members. So it said, you know, well the auditor general reported or the auditor reported on this particular issue and the Public Accounts Committee has issued these recommendations. It doesn't tell you a whole lot about what members of the PAC have done, you know — they expressed concern about this issue, they recommended above and beyond the auditor's report the following issues.

The way I envision this going further is that in jurisdictions where there are householders or flyers going to members, or to constituents . . . Is that the case here? Do you send out householders and flyers? That eventually if there was a non-partisan communications-type service — and that's very tricky, right, because you've got your . . . every legislature has their own spin groups but those aren't non-partisan. And then if you've got research support that tends not to be very . . . those people tend to be very good at research but their expertise is not necessarily communications. If you have a non-partisan communications person who can write something for the committee, then why not?

You know there's seven members of this committee. Those seven members could use that material in their householders. And it would be something to say, hey, yes I worked hard to, you know, to fight for accountability, I looked at the following issues, but it is in a non-partisan way. But you're still communicating in a way that demonstrates your effectiveness.

And that's an idea that I've mentioned to several . . . I mentioned it in the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee as well. And there is general interest but it's tricky to do because we all have limited resources.

The Chair: — It would be interesting to see what uptake there actually was from the media. Because the media, unless there's

a controversial issue that arises out of Public Accounts, really don't know we're sitting down here. I expect that, while this is being televised, there are very few people from the media that are monitoring this, and if I'm wrong I'm sure they'll come and tell me.

Mr. Dubrow: — If you're wrong, it's a slow news day.

The Chair: — But as you mentioned, our discussions tend to be very technical. And technical material is not considered very newsworthy and doesn't sell a lot of papers or excite a lot of advertisers on radio and television. So I guess what you're saying is, if you want to advertise what you do, you have to do it yourself through your own media, which would be a householder or mail-out to constituents. And then that of course would be limited pretty much to members on this committee.

Mr. Dubrow: — I think you're right, Mr. Chairman. I think that's in fact what I am saying is that we find as well in obviously our users and uses publication on performance reports is that the media is not interested in them. The media is interested in scandal generally and juicy things.

But you're right. In the case of members of the legislature, you have the ability to take your messages directly to your constituents. And again I understand these are not easy . . . these are not messages that are highly consumable because people don't have time to follow the work of a particular legislative committee or a Public Accounts Committee. But at the same time I think you do have the ability to . . . I don't think a lot of thought on the part of legislatures in general and on PACs in general has gone into how to communicate those messages. I think it's just been assumed that it's too difficult and not to bother.

And my suggestion would be that I think it's something that's worth thinking about and considering because I think taking that message directly to your constituents will be something that could only be useful, so . . .

The Chair: — Okay. Are there any other comments? You have another page yet of your report to go through or are we . . .

Mr. Dubrow: — No, that's all. The only other comment I have is that . . . Mr. Chairman, I've with your agreement handed out this PAC capacity survey, Public Accounts Committee capacity survey. And if members wouldn't mind filling it out, I think it would be very interesting because we look at . . . We go through the five phases of the strategy, and we look at whether or not your committee . . . We ask you whether or not your committee has the power to do so-and-so or whether so-and-so exists. But the other thing we do is we ask how important this is to you.

So, for example, one of the questions is, does your committee have adequate personnel assigned to it? And here, as one of the government members pointed out, research personnel and Clerk is kind of merged into one question so that's a bit dangerous because the particular member mentioned there was an excellent Clerk but no research personnel. But the question would be, how important is that to your committee?

If all seven members of the committee said, no, we don't have

adequate personnel, we need research assistants, and this is important to the committee, then it would demonstrate that there was some interest. So I'd certainly be interested, if members of the committee are, in getting your views on some of these issues and perhaps we could compile them anonymously and send them back.

The Chair: — Okay. So I don't see a way to respond. So would we, do you have a fax number that you want these faxed to or how would you want us . . .

Mr. Dubrow: — Sure.

The Chair: — To communicate this back to you?

Mr. Dubrow: — Sure. Great. A bird in hand is worth two in the bush. Sure.

A Member: — I'm about to lose one more member because we're past our deadline.

The Chair: — All right. Well I think we've completed the material that you had brought to our committee. We want to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to come to the province of Saskatchewan and share the knowledge and information that you've acquired through your work, both nationally and internationally, with our committee.

Saskatchewan has a reasonable reputation when it comes to a Public Accounts Committee, but I think there's a consensus around the table that any way that we can improve, we should endeavour to strive for. And you've given us a lot of food for thought. Perhaps, colleagues, what I might suggest is that we mull this over for a bit of time and if there is ground that we think we should or issues that we should pursue, perhaps an in camera session at some point where we see whether there's consensus on both sides of some new initiatives we might try based on the information you've brought to us would be worthwhile. I think if we are going to move in new directions, if we could do it on a consensus basis where both sides of the committee can come to agreement, it would be effective in the spirit of what Public Accounts Committee should do.

So if we can accomplish that, then perhaps there'll be some tangible results of your visit. In any regard, you've certainly given us much information to digest and we will endeavour to do that to the best of our ability. So thank you again for appearing.

And, Ms. Crofford, you want to make a comment.

Ms. Crofford: — I just want to add, as Vice-Chair, our thanks as well and to say that I think it is worth considering how we can advance accountability, broadly speaking. And I'd be interested in having that discussion at a later day.

Mr. Dubrow: — Well thank you very much to both the Chair and Vice-Chair for their comments. Much appreciated. And it's really a pleasure to be here and to be able to have participated in a dialogue about the work of your PAC.

I will just add that it's very encouraging to hear that this has stimulated interest and that there might be further discussions

about this within the Public Accounts Committee. CCAF would certainly be interested in following up with you. I'd be interested in following up. If there are areas that you decide you're interested in, we'd certainly look at . . . since my role is capacity development, we could certainly look at seeing how we might play a role in that if that was welcome on the part of the committee.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. We will consider that offer very seriously.

Colleagues, we will be back to our normal time for meeting next week, Tuesday morning at 10:30. Until we meet, I wish you well in your endeavours. Again I want to thank you, Mr. Auditor. You or very concerned about the proceedings. Thank you, Mr. Wendel, for being with us. And colleagues, I now declare the meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:57.]