



# **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS  
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Kelvington-Wadena

Ed Tchorzewski, Vice-Chair  
Regina Dewdney

Rod Gantefoer  
Melfort-Tisdale

Jack Goohsen  
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Ron Osika  
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Violet Stanger  
Lloydminster

Andrew Thomson  
Regina South

Grant Whitmore  
Saskatoon Northwest

**The Chair:** — Good morning, everyone. Being shortly after 9 I'm going to call the meeting to order. The Provincial Auditor has to be gone by 9:30 and I know the meeting is called till 10. We may have . . . we may be sitting a little longer but we'll just get right at the business of the day. But I'd like to start by asking Ron to introduce our guest from the United States.

**Mr. Osika:** — I'd like to introduce to you, ladies and gentlemen, Senator LeRoy Stumpf, who's come here to spend a couple of days on an exchange program — one that I was fortunate enough to participate in as well last week. So welcome, Senator Stumpf.

**All Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** — If you brought the rain, we thank you very much.

Today's meeting is . . . we have a very short agenda. I had hoped to follow the lead of the last Chair of the Public Accounts Committee in keeping the committee current in the yearly reports but with the Channel Lake and some of the other works going on we have . . . and responsibilities of some of the members which overlap, it's been difficult to call meetings.

We are behind in some of the issues or the agenda that we had looked at earlier that had been put together by the Provincial Auditor. And in talking with him and actually a short discussion with the Vice-Chair, we realize that some of the issues have been maybe dealt with in subsequent reports and resolved. Some of the issues that were maybe contentious have now been resolved.

So I would like to suggest that our time and maybe the taxpayers' best interests may be best spent in considering the possibility of not holding a meeting to get into the accounts until later on this summer.

I know that we've got the Channel Lake probably going on most of June and people wanting to have a summer holiday, and by that time, by the end of September, there will be another report due.

And at that we could be actually going over some old information and then again . . . and I'm hoping maybe the Provincial Auditor could look at doing another agenda for us that would work in the new report as well and dealing with some of these issues together.

I'm opening the floor for any comments to see if people have any objections to this.

**Ms. Stanger:** — No. Did you want some suggestions of dates, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** — Basically I was just wondering — at this time not really — I'm just wondering if this is okay and maybe we could proceed with the discussion from there. If somebody wants to actually start having Public Accounts meetings as soon as session is over, I'd like to hear that.

**Ms. Stanger:** — No, I think you're . . . in my opinion your

comments are . . . that's a good comment.

**The Chair:** — Okay. There is a couple of items, three items then that I'd like to discuss. The first one being the conference for the Public Accounts Committee in Yellowknife. We would have to have a motion passed at this committee to send the representatives. And I'm not sure we have to pass the motion to pay for anything, but we should have this motion passed. The Yellowknife convention I believe is August 16 to 19. I guess we have a motion coming forward to deal with that.

**Ms. Stanger:** — Madam Chair, could you please clarify who is entitled to go with expenses paid so we've got that straight.

**The Chair:** — The Chair and the Vice-Chair have been approved with their expenses, but also we could have one more committee member now. I understand that the Board of Internal Economy has approved one more member attending with their expenses paid this year. So it would be Chair, Vice-Chair, and one more member.

**Ms. Stanger:** — That's what's new; that's why I asked.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — If one of the two of Vice-Chair and Chair is unable to attend, can we designate a substitute? Because in my case, I'm unable to attend at that time and I would just as soon have one of my other colleagues take my place.

**Mr. Osika:** — Well you would have to then give it up to one of the other parties?

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — Nice try, Mr. Osika.

**Mr. Osika:** — I'm defeated already; I just got here.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — Us Poles have to stick together, but there are limits even there.

**The Chair:** — So there will be a Chair, a Vice-Chair, and one other committee member if we would like. Maybe we should get the motion on the floor first.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Well the motion, Madam Chair, just speaks to the Chair and Vice-Chair. If the committee would like to include a potential third member, we'll have to modify the motion somewhat.

**The Chair:** — Well let's put the motion on the floor and then we can modify it or amend it perhaps.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — I can fix it before I move it if you want.

**Ms. Stanger:** — Well, Mr. Gantefoer, I would suggest that since the Board of Internal Economy has included that, that you should include it in your motion. Because I know when I went to Edmonton last year, provinces like B.C., being more frivolous than us, sent their whole committee. So I think this is why they considered . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I just had to throw that in. But so I think if we're allowed three we should send three, because it's a real educational process and I very much enjoyed that and got to know the auditor better.

**A Member:** — Our auditor?

**Ms. Stanger:** — Yes.

**The Chair:** — Maybe all comments should go through the Chair.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — May I suggest you rule that — order — and we should not pursue that any further. Now I was going to make another comment. I had the privilege of actually hosting as a Chair of Public Accounts Committee at such a conference here in Saskatchewan, and I can say from the knowledge I gained that it is a very useful conference to attend. This is not a social event. This is a working conference from which any member who goes will glean a lot of valuable information which will be very helpful in the work of this committee.

So I would really encourage, if we are able to send three, that we should send three.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Madam Chair, I'd be pleased to move:

That this committee authorize the attendance of the Chair and Vice-Chair and a third member of the committee, or their respective designates, together with the committee Clerk at the annual meeting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees to be held in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, August 16 through August 18, 1998.

**The Chair:** — Heard the motion? Does anyone want to speak to this motion? Okay. All in favour of this motion? The motion is carried.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — To have said earlier, as Vice-Chair I am unable to attend because of other commitments in my family and I have spoken to my colleagues about an alternate, and Mr. Whitmore and Mr. Jess are both interested in going. So I would bow to them.

**The Chair:** — So they would be your substitute but we would still have now an opportunity for a third member to go as suggested.

**Mr. Thomson:** — I would suggest that — I understand that Mr. Whitmore would be attending on behalf of Mr. Tchorzewski — I'd suggest Mr. Jess be the third delegate.

**The Chair:** — Any other comments?

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Madam Chair, I certainly appreciate that but I think that in the incidence that there is a third party representative on this committee, that I'd like to suggest as a suggestion that the member from the third party be included at this time.

**Mr. Whitmore:** — I think, Madam Chair — if I could speak to that — I have some sympathy for that move, and I think it would be important that we do send a member of the third party and I would certainly be willing to concede to Mr. Jess to attend as the representative in place of Mr. Tchorzewski and I would not attend the conference. So we would allow a third party member to attend.

**The Chair:** — I'm hearing then that there would be a representative from the government, from the opposition, and from the third party? Is that in agreement?

**A Member:** — No.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Madam Chair, I'll move that Mr. Osika be the third representative of the committee at the conference.

**Mr. Goohsen:** — Madam Chair, I think just for information — and maybe I'm wrong, so people can correct me here — I have some understanding that anyone of this committee would be allowed to go to this conference. If you were to pay for the trip out of your travel allowance as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), you would be allowed to go.

So in view of the fact that many members have larger travel allowances from out in the country as compared to those from the cities, some of those from out in the country who may want to check their records might find that they haven't been using all of their travel allowance and simply use that, and allow those from the city to go under this program, and everyone go.

And if our province were represented by five or six people, then so much the better.

**Ms. Stanger:** — Madam Chair, I just want to say that I intend to go, and I am going to use my travel allowance. I have checked with the Speaker. He just requires a letter and that is allowed under the new rules. So I'm doing that.

**The Chair:** — We have a motion on the floor right now that Mr. Osika attend as the third delegate that's actually paid for by this committee. Is everyone in favour of that? Okay that is carried.

So we have three paid members going . . . three members, whose expenses will be paid by the committee, going, and there will be at least one other member attending and perhaps more.

Anyone that intends — pardon me — anyone that plans to attend the convention, either on their own expense . . . should allow the Clerk's office to know that so that they can let the people in Yellowknife know and make all the arrangements as necessary. So as quickly as possible let them know.

**Mr. Osika:** — Madam Chair, I just want to express my appreciation to the committee for their consideration, and I look forward to participating, and I again thank you for your consideration.

**The Chair:** — Okay, the convention is taken care of. And we do have my suggestion — the original suggestion — that we put off until September, actual planned meetings of the Public Accounts Committee. But I think in front of you, I have laid a letter out dated May 26 talking about the guidance for directors for the millennium bug — talking about the year 2000.

And when I think about the responsibility to the taxpayers of this province, there's one issue that this committee could deal with immediately that I suggest we could be on top of and that's the issue of conversion for the year 2000.

I understand that other provinces have an officer that is actually looking after it, where someone can actually go to this person and ask for the status of different departments for the year 2000. I believe it's one of the issues that most companies and governments are going to be facing. And if we wait until the middle of next year, probably the expertise that is available for helping could be snapped up. And we also could have departments dealing with programs that are not . . . will not be able to operate in the year 2000 without looking at this other problem.

So I'm suggesting that perhaps by the end of June we ask some representatives of a government department, whether it's Department of Finance, somebody from Crown corporations, somebody from Executive Council, meet with the Public Accounts Committee. It wouldn't have to be a long session but to give us an update and let us know where we're sitting at with this issue.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — Could we ask the gentlemen at the end of the table, who may know something about this, to tell us what they know.

**Mr. Paton:** — Madam Chair, as you said, in some governments there is a central agency who's got an information technology officer who's responsible for this for all of government. That doesn't exist in the province of Saskatchewan.

However — all departments are dealing with this issue on an individual basis — there is an area in the Department of Economic Development that has an information technology area. They've done a number of surveys on this. They might be able to attend and provide some update as to what's happening. Finance could attend. We do have some of the major central systems, and I can assure you we're well aware of this issue and spending a considerable amount of effort dealing with the problem. But that is just, you know, one or two of the major central systems.

We wouldn't be able to speak to what's happening across government, but Economic Development may be able to provide some information on what's happening across government. They, as I say, they have done a number of surveys on this issue.

**The Chair:** — I think that probably would give the members some peace of mind just knowing what's actually happening. And we'll have the opportunity to discuss any of these . . . any glitches they may feel are happening or maybe even bring forward any concerns they have that maybe we could help address.

So I would think that maybe if we have one meeting towards the end of June — hopefully session would be over — then set a date for it and then maybe then we can set dates for later on in September to start dealing with the other issues after the next report is out by the Provincial Auditor.

Would that be all right — acceptable?

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — I know the kind of schedules that we have till the session is over and for many of us they're fairly horrendous. I also know that . . . and I'm glad Terry made his

comments, but since our meetings of some weeks ago I did raise it with the auditor privately, and he was good enough to give me some information. I have since then pursued it with various ministers to find out what it is happening, what is happening, if in fact there are things that are taking place.

I'm not sure we would want to here today schedule a meeting any date in particular, because things are at this stage of the session such that they are pretty flux, in flux, and when we schedule a meeting and find out that the House is sitting at that time, I mean I can't predict that but we all know that as a session goes into its final weeks there is no way that you can determine from day to day what's going to be the order of the day the next day.

I would suggest that we note that this is an important issue and then wait to see how the session is proceeding in its winding down — whenever that happens — and then get together and see if we can pursue this again knowing that it's important to try to find some way in which we can get some information.

**The Chair:** — Any other comments? I'd like to . . . I appreciate that and I think the only thing I'd like to add is we would probably like to see it happen before we all go on our summer vacations; so that we have . . . the department officials know as well that we will be asking for that before we leave for the summer. So rather than setting a date at this time, which hopefully will be between . . . we won't set the date at this time but knowing that it will happen before we go into summer recess.

Is there any point in trying to set a meeting for the end of September or the beginning of October? Starting into Public Accounts. Okay.

**Ms. Stanger:** — Yes, we need to set a couple of dates because we have a lot of work I think, Madam Chair. We have a suggestion, August 31 to September 4. Unless . . . did you have some . . . you wanted late September instead? We had two dates: October 5 to 9, and August 31 to September 4.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Madam Chair, can I ask, is the date set for the fall report?

**The Chair:** — No.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — For the release of it?

**Mr. Strelloff:** — Members, Mr. Gantefer, we do reissue a volume 1 of our fall report which focuses on the finances of the province. Our plan is to release it in late September but it is dependent on when the government chooses to table the volume 1 of the *Public Accounts*, which in the past couple of years has been around the beginning of September.

If that happens this year then we would be ready by the end of September. The *Public Accounts*, by law, have to be tabled by the end of October, but the practice over the last few years has been to table them earlier and earlier and earlier. And I think last year it was around the first week of September.

So my answer is it depends on whether that practice continues. If that practice continues then we would have that volume 1 out

by the end of September. Now you do have a lot of issues to address other than the overall finances of the government, and so it wouldn't preclude an August 31 to September meeting.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — I think, Madam Chair, I think the auditor is correct about . . . in fact he's correct in what he's saying, but he is right certainly that there is some catch-up work that we need to do. And I think it would be useful if we would get on with it now.

I think we're flexible. For example, if these people have scheduled holidays or something like that, I think we'd have to look at all that. But it's going to take more than a week.

My guess is we're going to meet for a week and then we're going to come back at some time for another week and we're going to come back for some time for another week in order to be able to get some of this work done.

**Ms. Stanger:** — Madam Chair, that's what we were looking at. We didn't want to see — my thought was to the Vice-Chair . . . to be out of my constituency for two weeks. That isn't good because you're out of your constituency during session.

I was thinking that it would be better to be away a week at a time. And just looking it all over, we didn't think you'd do it in two weeks. So we thought we'd get started but, like Mr. Tchorzewski said, we're flexible.

**The Chair:** — There's been a suggestion for August 31 to September 4, in which we could deal with some of the issues besides what's happening in the accounts that are coming up. Is there any objection to that date?

**Mr. Gantefer:** — I'm not sure, but I am scheduled to be a new grandfather about the third week in August so I can't promise. It takes priority . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'm going to be there afterwards to start the spoiling early.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — I have been one four times; please let me assure you, you have nothing to do with it.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — I can appreciate that.

**The Chair:** — I think that to set this date would be important to get started. I feel that we shouldn't be putting it off a lot longer. You don't know what'll happen next fall, and I feel that we should start this date and then maybe set another one after that week, knowing that we can't go any later than September 4 because then I go on holidays.

So then we'll have a meeting later on in June, for probably an afternoon or a day, to deal with this issue of conversion to the year 2000. And then we'll have our weeks session starting August 31. Is that in agreement?

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — You, Madam Chair, and I should get together, I mean not the next week or so but fairly early in the process, and set the agendas.

**The Chair:** — Yes. Okay. Any other discussion?

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — We are adjourned.

**The Chair:** — We are adjourned.

**Mr. Tchorzewski:** — I so move.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 9:30 a.m.