

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, September 26, 2018**

**Legislative Chamber**

**Committee Business**

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## **Public Accounts Committee**

Mr. Allan MacMaster (Chairman)  
Mr. Gordon Wilson (Vice-Chairman)  
Mr. Ben Jessome  
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft  
Mr. Brendan Maguire  
Mr. Hugh MacKay  
Hon. Christopher d'Entremont  
Hon. David Wilson  
Ms. Lisa Roberts

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Nicole Arsenault,  
Assistant Clerk - Office of the Speaker

Mr. Terry Spicer,  
Deputy Auditor General



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2018**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

10:45 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Gordon Wilson

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. We have just met with the subcommittee of this committee and we have a record of decision to present to the full committee. You have that before you. Do members wish to take a couple of minutes to look at the record of decision? Members are satisfied to proceed with a vote? There are six topics plus a training session

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The record of decision has been defeated. So much for working together.

What do members wish to do because we don't have any meetings to put forward.  
Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I'm not sure what that comment about working together was.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The comment refers to fact that we just had a meeting of the subcommittee. At our last meeting, we talked about working together, trying to find some topics that we could agree upon and work together. Perhaps do something new at Public Accounts where all members would look at a witness who has come in and work together on questioning.

The subcommittee came to an agreement on some topics. They've been brought to the full committee. The full committee has voted them down. We don't have any topics. There has been a bit of a delay with the House being prorogued, so we are no further ahead and that's why I said so much for us working together.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you for clarifying that. I wish to make a motion that would, I think, address the same issue. It's how to get there. I move that the agenda items for PAC be set through the Auditor General reports beginning with the May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018 performance and that future agenda sequences for scheduling to follow the order of chapters for each subsequent report tabled by the Auditor General with appropriate department witnesses.

By making that motion, I would like to just add a few comments. The topics that were brought forward by the sub-committee, if members will review those topics, would address almost the entirety of all those topics that were there.

I'd like to add that I know this is a major change from the standard that we've followed. This brings this committee to full accountability - full transparency - and I think it's the right thing to do. I think it follows best practices that we have across Canada. It's a standard and a process that many other Public Accounts Committees follow. It will allow us to address what has been brought forward to us by the Auditor General, of not having audits come before this committee.

I think that's a very fair comment that was made that we do not fully and openly bring all of our audit reports from the AG here. I think it would allow a lot of clarity, also, in how we work and moving us forward working together. In reflection, the end means is the same. It's more us moving forward with a more transparent, a more open, and a more responsive process. If you actually look at the Terms of Reference for this committee, meets it to a T. I'll close with those comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: For the record, all of the topics that had just been proposed are all related to Auditor General chapters, but I'll let Mr. d'Entremont comment.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: So we just spent over an hour in subcommittee talking about a proposal from the Liberal member. We understood the spirit of the suggestion and we actually agreed with the spirit of what was presented to us. Yet we felt that it still is a big change for this committee and we would find a way to temporarily consider it to look at the topics that we had already presented and see how they fit into the proposal that was being put forward by the member for Clare-Digby. I was more than happy to take two of my topics and push them off to January, when the Auditor General has their report brought to the floor. I think we did everything in the spirit of what the member is talking about.

What I take tremendous offense at is the government members once again using their majority to impose a sequence of events on this committee - impose their will on this committee - without working together. That was the spirit of what we tried to do last week. We said, listen, let's go sit down in this committee, and let's try to find a way to work together. When they didn't get their way, they used their majority once again to get their way in this committee. I think we went a long ways in the discussion this morning. I find it just unimaginable that we're at this point.

What I'm going to say is this: No. 1, this is going to go forward because of course they have the majority on this committee, and No. 2, I will keep them to account. The second that we have an item in this Chamber on one of these chapters, and I hear one question that's warm and fuzzy and not to the point of asking the question to a witness - you know, Mr. Whoever, can you tell me about this nice-nice thing that's going on - I'm going to call them out on it. If they want to work together, and they want to make sure that we use this committee the way it's supposed to be used, I don't want to hear any more of those nicey-nicey questions. Let's keep the government to account. Let's keep the departments to account by the decision that are before them.

I can tell you one thing. I don't believe in the vote that we're going to have in a moment, and I don't want to be a part of the vote that we have in a moment. I'll see you next week when we come back to discuss the departments as it goes forward. I'm leaving.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: I feel that as a committee, there was potential for us as a group, all of whom are in our roles as elected officials, to arrive at a point where we could support changes in line with the member's proposal. But that requires all of us together actually arriving at that understanding. It requires all of us together changing the practice of the Public Accounts Committee.

Frankly, simply using majority rules to fast-track changes without buy-in, without engagement, without compromise from everyone learning and everyone contributing is, unfortunately, I think at least in the short term, going to set back the goal of making Public Accounts a space where non-partisan work can happen. I regret that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The honourable David Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: I'm definitely concerned about the approach the government members have taken on Public Accounts. I have mentioned this before - I have sat on this committee for many years. I think in the last number of months, especially in the last couple of weeks, we as an Opposition Party have shown an attempt to try to address some of the concerns that the government members of this committee have brought forward. I believe we have made the attempt to try to address some of the concerns the Auditor General brought forward to our committee by presenting the witnesses we have.

To hear the member from the government caucus say, well, the witness list was pretty much everything that will happen with the motion the member made - to me, then why are we going through subcommittee if that's not what we're going to allow that committee to do?

Similar to my colleague, I guess it doesn't matter. I don't support the motion that the government made and it's obvious that the government is going to do what they're going to do, so I too will see you next week when Public Accounts Committee happens I guess. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So, for clarification, Mr. Gordon Wilson, are you suggesting that the subcommittee of Public Accounts no longer meet to discuss topics, but that the topics as proposed by your motion where it states all agenda items for the Public Accounts committee be set through the Auditor General Reports beginning with the May 29, 2018, performance report, be thus the mechanism by which we, as a committee, choose witnesses to appear before the committee?

MR. GORDON WILSON: No, I'm not suggesting that at all and, actually, I had another motion that I'd like to bring forward after for the subcommittee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll deal with one motion at a time. But your motion is proposing - I hate to bring legal counsel into this, but is it appropriate for the committee to no longer select topics through the subcommittee and use Auditor General Reports to dictate what the committee chooses to discuss and what witnesses are chosen to appear before the committee?

MS. NICOLE ARSENAULT: Well, I'd have to probably confer with legal counsel, Gordon Hebb, but I believe that the subcommittee is a creation of this committee. So it would be up for the committee to decide what to then do with the subcommittee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So ultimately the majority of the government caucus here can decide how the committee operates.

MS. ARSENAULT: Based on the motion that Mr. Gordon Wilson has brought forward, I'm not sure that's exactly what the motion was asking. I'm not sure - I'd have to hear the motion again.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure, with respect to - I guess I'm responding to your comment that the subcommittee is a creation of the full committee. Thus, if the full committee, which is a majority of members of the Liberal caucus, decide the subcommittee is no longer going to choose meetings but is going to have them set by the Auditor General Reports, that would suggest that the committee is thus controlled by the majority of the members of the committee - but I just make that comment to clarify why I was asking the question. Thank you for the response.

So the motion before the committee, Mr. Gordon Wilson, perhaps you could repeat it again and we will hold a vote on it.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Yes, I move that all agenda items for Public Accounts be set through the Auditor General Reports beginning with the May 29, 2018, performance report and that future agenda sequences for scheduling to follow up the order of chapters, to follow the order of chapters for each subsequent report tabled by the Auditor General with the appropriate department witnesses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried. Our clerk will make note of that.

Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Yes, I'd like to make another motion - that the Public Accounts Subcommittee meet on a future day to discuss developing a plan to implement a follow-up strategy for report recommendations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Can you ....

MR. GORDON WILSON: If I could add a few comments on that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I think in our subcommittee meeting this morning, we had some excellent points brought forward on follow up. I think they are conversations that we've had in the past and I think it deserves another fulsome conversation, as we've had today, a very good conversation I think on Public Accounts Committee. But I think we've all had a chance just most recently at our national convention for public accounts to hear some best practices, again, that are being carried across the province, and I think a good conversation, as Ms. Roberts had alluded to on follow up, would be a good opportunity to add more to this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We need agreement from the committee to extend the meeting beyond the 11:00 a.m. end time here. I don't expect it will go much further - is there agreement to extend the meeting?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried

Okay, the meeting will extend. So Mr. Gordon Wilson has clarified the last motion he's put forward there.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried

Is there any further business to come before the committee? (Interruption) I actually thought we were going to defer that to the next meeting - yes, I think we'll defer it to the next meeting, given the time today.

Thank you. If there's no further business to come before the committee, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:01 a.m.]