

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE ESTIMATES OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL AND THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

Committee Room 1

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**SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW
THE ESTIMATES OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL
AND THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER**

Hon. Gordon Gosse (Chairman)
Hon. Frank Corbett
Ms. Pam Birdsall
Hon. Maurice Smith
Ms. Becky Kent
Hon. Michel Samson
Mr. Andrew Younger
Hon. Christopher d'Entremont

[Hon. Michel Samson was replaced by Ms. Kelly Regan.]

In Attendance:

Mr. Neil Ferguson
Chief Clerk
House of Assembly

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Annette Boucher
Assistant Clerk
House of Assembly

Ms. Deborah Lusby
Director of Administration
Office of the Speaker

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2013

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW
THE ESTIMATES OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL
AND THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER**

3:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Hon. Gordon Gosse

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon. I'd like to call to order the meeting of the Special Committee of the House of Assembly. On the agenda today, the first item is the review of the 2013-14 Estimates of the Auditor General's Office; and the second item for review will be the 2013-14 Estimates of Elections Nova Scotia.

With no further delays, I will ask the Chief Clerk to present the options.

MR. NEIL FERGUSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The first item on the agenda, as you said, is the Estimates of the Auditor General for the upcoming year. The materials have all been circulated to the committee but I'll just sum up the three options that they ended with.

Option 1 represents no change in the 2012-13 budget. However, cost-of-living and pay-for-performance salary increases would require staffing reductions that would result in the loss of 1.5 staff full-time equivalents and, therefore, one less performance or IT audit.

Option 2 represents the funds needed to maintain the status quo of the AG's service, and in order to keep current staff levels and the numbers of audits that they have been performing, to do that they would need an additional \$82,800 to offset the mandated cost-of-living and pay-for-performance increases.

Finally, the third option they outline represents an increase of three audits annually, which would necessitate adding four staff members and increasing the budget by \$379,800.

The various options are set out in a table on Page 5 of the materials provided. The Auditor General's Office is recommending that the committee approve and recommend to the Treasury Board, Option 2, which maintains the current staffing and service levels. That's the summary of the options.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Now everybody on the committee has heard the options, so do I have a motion from somebody on the committee that we select Option 1, 2 or 3?

MS. PAM BIRDSALL: I so move that we accept Option 2.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: I'll second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, moved by Ms. Birdsall and seconded by Mr. Younger.

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

The motion is carried.

Moving right on with the agenda now is the review of the 2013-14 Estimates of Elections Nova Scotia. I will now ask the Chief Clerk to read those options.

MR. FERGUSON: The Chief Electoral Officer has also provided the committee with three alternatives. They are set out in the materials. Alternative 1 would see operations and staff levels remaining consistent with the current funding; Alternative 2, increased operations in areas of training and staff development; and Alternative 3 would see a 3 per cent reduction in operating costs, excluding the registered party funding. The risk of Alternative 3, they state, is that the plan includes fewer returning office staff trained and that greatly increases the probability of less effectively run elections.

The three funding alternatives are set out in Exhibit 2 and the recommendation from the Chief Electoral Office is that the committee approve and recommend to the Treasury Board, Alternative 1 - a budget of \$3.427 million, which funds constant staffing levels and an election-ready team.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now hearing all the options, I look for a motion for Elections Nova Scotia for Alternative 1, 2 or 3. Mr. Smith.

HON. MAURICE SMITH: I so move the adoption of Alternative 1.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I'll second the motion.

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

The motion is carried.

I would like to thank everybody for showing up today for such a short meeting and getting the business done. We now stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:05 p.m.]