

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

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

Thursday, January 21, 2016

Legislative Chamber

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

Hon. Kevin Murphy (Chairman)
Hon. Michel Samson
Hon. Labi Kousoulis
Mr. Iain Rankin
Hon. Christopher d'Entremont
Mr. Larry Harrison
Hon. David Wilson
Mr. Neil Ferguson, Chief Clerk of the House of Assembly
(Non-Voting Member)

In Attendance:

Speaker's Office Adviser
Ms. Deborah Lusby
Director of Administration
Office of the Speaker

Ms. Annette Boucher
Assistant Clerk
House of Assembly

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2016

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10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Hon. Kevin Murphy

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. I guess now that everybody is here and accounted for, we'll get underway. We're going to start today's meeting with the Special Committee of the House of Assembly.

Just for the record, before we get started, for purposes of roll call, if we could just go through and state the names of the members of the Management Commission who are here and present.

[The Management Commission members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moving on, the first item of business is the Special Committee of the House of Assembly, where we present the estimates of the Auditor General's Office and Elections Nova Scotia. These materials have been circulated in advance to all members of the committee, and we'll open it up for discussions and questions, if any.

We have our representatives from both bodies here, so I guess we'll begin with No. 1, which is the Auditor General's Office. Are there any questions or comments on the estimates as submitted by the Auditor General? Chief Clerk Ferguson.

MR. NEIL FERGUSON: I would just note that the materials were circulated, and the first item is the Auditor General's Office. The estimates they're asking for are \$3.831 million. It's all set out in the materials that have been provided to the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions or comments?

Barring discussion, can we have a motion? Chief Clerk Ferguson.

MR. FERGUSON: The motion would be to recommend the estimates to the Treasury Board.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Samson.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Just for clarification - if I'm looking at these numbers correctly, this would actually be a slight decrease in the budget from the current fiscal year. Is that correct? Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any further discussion? Can we have a motion for the recommendation to accept the Auditor General's estimates as presented? The motion is made by Mr. Rankin, seconded by Mr. Samson.

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

The motion is carried.

No. 2 is the estimates provided by Elections Nova Scotia. Chief Clerk Ferguson.

MR. NEIL FERGUSON: Again, Mr. Chairman, the supporting materials have been circulated. The estimate request is \$4.729 million, and all the supporting information is provided in the materials.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions or comments on that report? Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I'm just wondering - more a comment than anything. We continue to see an increase in this budget, mostly because of the unknown of when the election date might happen. I know we've had a number of Parties in this House of Assembly who have talked about fixed election dates. I think it's just more saying, if we had a fixed election date, we'd save a little bit of money for these guys, and I would suggest these guys would be able to plan just that much better. But I think they're continually in a state of being ready just in case, and that's costing us money. That's costing taxpayers money as well. I don't know if there's any remedy to this except once again to call on government to finally come up with a fixed election date.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions or comments? Mr. Samson.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: I note that the Chief Electoral Officer is here with his staff. If he could maybe briefly just walk us through the requested increase here and what is behind that specific increase.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

MS. DOROTHY RICE: Good morning. I am Dorothy Rice, and I am from Elections Nova Scotia, the Director of Electoral Finance. If you turn to Page 7 of the document, you'll see the reconciliation of what types of costs we are expecting to spend on in the next fiscal year. They comprise three big buckets of money: printed materials to have election-ready in the warehouse; IT equipment for a similar reason; and then the training. Our first training will take place in April of this year for the returning officers and their assistants. We'll have over 100 people here in the city being trained. The breakdown of the increase is there. That's why we're having to spend the money, so we can be election-ready for September 1, 2016.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions or comments? Mr. Kousoulis.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: A question, based on these expenditures, printed material and IT equipment, having a fixed election date or not knowing the exact election date, will that change the cost of printed materials or IT equipment?

MS. RICE: No, I don't believe that the cost would change at all. It's just a timing issue. If we don't incur the cost this year, we will next year. The bigger increase, or the change for a fixed versus flexible date, is that we have to keep retraining the individuals who are going to be working in the election.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: You indicated some training is going to happen in April. Do you have officers for every riding? Are there 51, or do you have any vacancies where you're looking for returning officers?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gzowski.

MR. PETER GZOWSKI: Right now, we have four vacancies; we're missing four returning officers.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Are you able to tell us where?

MR. GZOWSKI: Yes, Halifax Atlantic, Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley, and Glace Bay.

MR. WILSON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions or comments? Mr. Samson.

MR. SAMSON: Just on another matter, I received an update recently regarding the court challenge that had been launched by the Acadian Federation. I'm just curious, from Elections Nova Scotia's perspective, are there plans being made there as a contingency, depending on what the outcome of that court challenge may be?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Temporale.

MR. RICHARD TEMPORALE: Not at this time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions or concerns?

Barring more questions, can we have a motion to accept the estimates as presented by Elections Nova Scotia? Moved by Mr. Samson. Seconded by Mr. d'Entremont.

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

The motion is carried. The estimates of Elections Nova Scotia are accepted as tabled.

I want to thank our guests from the Auditor General's Office and Elections Nova Scotia for helping us out this morning.

That concludes the business of the special committee. We'll recess while our guests excuse themselves. They're welcome to stay for the excitement of the regular commission meeting, of course.

[The committee adjourned at 10:14 a.m.]