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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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**Tuesday, October 19, 2004**

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**Chair**

**Mr. John Williams**

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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Tuesday, October 19, 2004

• (1535)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee:** Honourable members, I see a quorum. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), your first item of business is to elect a chair, and I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Fitzpatrick.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC):** I move that we appoint the member from Edmonton—St. Albert, John Williams, as the chair of this committee.

**The Clerk:** Are there any other nominations? I declare nominations for chair closed.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion that John Williams be elected chair of this committee?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** We will now move to elect the government vice-chair. There are two vice-chairs on this committee, one being the government vice-chair and another being the other opposition vice-chair.

So we'll proceed to the government vice-chair.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** I'd like to nominate Mr. Mark Holland.

**The Clerk:** Are there any other nominations?

It's moved by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj that Mr. Holland be elected government vice-chair of this committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** We now proceed to the vice-chair of the other opposition party. I am prepared to receive nominations to that effect.

Mr. Gagnon.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ):** I nominate the Member for Repentigny.

**The Clerk:** Are there any other nominations? Mr. Gagnon moves that Mr. Benoît Sauvageau be elected Vice-Chair of this committee

for the other opposition party. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** Thank you very much and congratulations everyone.  
[English]

I invite Mr. Williams to take the chair.

**The Chair (Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC)):** Thank you very much, Madam Clerk, for the efficient way in which you conduct meetings. Perhaps we'll have to take lessons from the clerk.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your vote of confidence in myself and the two vice-chairs that you have just elected to run this committee for the next while. I've had the pleasure of being the committee chair since 1997, and most of the time we work harmoniously, collegially. As I say, there's enough accountability to go around without having to worry too much about partisan politics, but there are times when partisan politics come to the fore as well.

We want to ensure as far as possible that the committee does its job on behalf of all Canadians to be that institution of accountability, to do it appropriately, fairly, and with integrity, so that the government knows that we do live in a democracy and that they are accountable to Parliament and to the public accounts committee.

We normally deal with motions. I'm going to ask the clerk to circulate the procedural and administrative motions and then we will have them available. We'll vote on them at the next meeting, and there are a number of issues that we need to deal with.

I'm going to call a steering committee for our normal block on Thursday, which is 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. That requires one member for every party. That's the way we've always worked in the past, and I presume that will be acceptable in the future.

Behind every good MP is a great staff, and we have a great staff member here in Ms. Kingston. She is pointing out that we should pass the first motion of the standard procedural and administrative motions, that there be the chair, the two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party to compose the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. That would mean the chair, Mr. Holland, Mr. Sauvageau, and a member of the other party, which would therefore mean Mr. Christopherson from the NDP, would form the steering committee.

Is there agreement that we adopt that motion?

Mr. Lastewka.

• (1540)

**Hon. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, is the wording on this sheet that you've passed out the same as we've had in previous meetings?

**The Chair:** I believe so. That is correct.

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** Has anything been altered?

**The Chair:** Nothing has been altered.

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** Then I would so move.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** We should also do the next one, which is to retain the service of the Library of Parliament, so Mr. O'Neal can join us. He has a new compatriot as well from the library. So why don't we do the second one: that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist the committee in its work, at the discretion of the chair.

**An hon. member:** So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Mr. O'Neal and Mr. Pigeon, come forward and join us at the table, please.

We're going to have a steering committee on Thursday afternoon. Of course, we went off to fight an election, and we welcome the new members who are joining us for the first time, both in Parliament and in the committee. As we know, we left without a report on an issue that was before the committee at the time, being the Auditor General's investigation into the problems with the advertising contracts.

Where we go from there regarding a report of our investigation, witnesses were not called forward because we went off to fight an election. We have other business, normally. We have ignored the Auditor General's report, apart from that one chapter, since January.

I would like to have a discussion in private with the members of all parties so we can hopefully get off on a collegial start of working together on an agenda on which we can all agree. Again, for these new members, the way we've always worked is that if there is no consensus at the steering committee, then it comes here for a vote. We try as far as possible to develop a consensus and move that forward.

Any other discussion before I adjourn the meeting? Any questions, especially for the new people? I invite them to ask questions, to feel comfortable, to understand the process by which we operate.

Mr. Murphy.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, considering that there are eight new members on the committee, very few returning members, would it not be wise, perhaps, for the researchers from the Library of Parliament and maybe the clerk to have a separate briefing for the new members to spend an hour and a half to go over...

There have been some very good summaries done. The interim report that was issued, I think it would be helpful to... Members may not want to take advantage of it, but I think it would be helpful to go

over the history of this particular investigation, when we started it, the witnesses we did hear from. I know summaries are prepared, so I throw that out for discussion, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** I think that's an excellent idea, Mr. Murphy.

In addition, the clerk has advised me that all members are going to be receiving a copy of this manual, which is the briefing book on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It's interesting reading.

I'll just give you a heads-up, also. The Parliamentary Centre, as you know, is an NGO that was created here about 35 years ago, focusing on governance. They've approached me about providing an orientation seminar for the public accounts committee. If this goes well, they would like to do this for all committees. As a new Parliament concept, this is something new to be brought forward for the benefit of parliamentarians. We'll have a discussion on this on Thursday afternoon. So think that one through as well, because these are the things I believe we should try to take advantage of to get to know each other and to understand where we're all coming from, so we can provide some clear direction of where a committee should be going. It allows us to hopefully do our jobs better. We'll discuss that again on Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Lastewka.

• (1545)

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** In addition to Mr. Murphy's recommendation about the synopsis, I take it that would include the 29 recommendations that were developed as part of the package.

**The Chair:** As far as the investigation we were conducting last spring, I would expect that the library would give the new members as full and frank a briefing as possible.

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** Some of us might want to attend too.

**The Chair:** That's right.

I would expect that we would have a motion coming forward soon to adduce all the testimony from the previous Parliament to this Parliament, which means of course that as we stand today, the testimony that was given in the springtime is not before Parliament, because Parliament was dissolved and we went off to fight an election. In order for that information to be before us, we would have to introduce a motion to adduce the information and testimony so that it is then properly before this committee and we move forward from there.

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** Secondly, I would agree with you that it would be very good and helpful to work with the Parliamentary Centre. Since our meeting dates are Tuesdays Thursdays, would it be possible to... I'm not sure why we need to go off site if we need to have discussions on that. Wouldn't it be better for us to have that sooner rather than later? If Tuesday, October 26, is our regular meeting, could you do some planning with the centre to have it done that afternoon? Then it would give time for the steering committee and the rest of the committee to do its work following that.

**The Chair:** We were contemplating very, very soon, because the later we leave it the less relevant it becomes. So you're suggesting Tuesday, October 26. We were actually thinking of Wednesday, right after caucus, like 12:30 we'd leave the Hill, which would mean that we wouldn't be at question period that day. Now, for members of the cabinet and the government that may present a problem.

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** I'd be glad to put a motion if you wish.

**The Chair:** No, no motions today.

**Hon. Walt Lastewka:** Okay.

Since Tuesday the 26th is our regular meeting, and you need some time to talk with the centre, let's get on with it: let's do it Tuesday, from two o'clock till however long we need. You said four hours, I think, did you? Did you say four or three hours?

**The Chair:** They were talking about a four-hour meeting. I think I'll bring it to the steering committee on Thursday, and they can make a presentation. As I said, I'm just kind of giving you a head's-up because there are no motions today.

Mr. Murphy.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** One final comment, Mr. Chairman.

I noticed on the standard procedural and administrative motions circulated by the clerk that there isn't a standard one for the 48 hours' notice.

**The Chair:** Yes, that might be on by Thursday. That will be debated on Thursday as well.

Do any of the new members have any questions they'd like to raise? No further business? Okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

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