

# PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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**DATE OF HEARING:** 17 JULY 2019

**MEETING STATUS:** PUBLIC

**LOCATION:** LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

**SUBJECT:** WORK PLAN AND CONSIDERATION OF ORIENTATION

**COMMITTEE:**

Michele Beaton, MLA Mermaid-Stratford [Chair]  
Cory Deagle, MLA Montague-Kilmuir [Vice Chair]  
Karla Bernard, MLA Charlottetown-Victoria Park  
Heath MacDonald, MLA Cornwall-Meadowbank  
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Donagh  
Gordon McNeilly, MLA Charlottetown-West Royalty

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

none

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

none

**GUESTS:**

none

**STAFF:**

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research and Committees)

Edited by Hansard

The Committee met at 11:00 a.m.

**Chair (Beaton):** I'll call the first Public Accounts committee meeting to order for the 66<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

Just a quick intro for who's on the – I think we all know each other, but just for Hansard. So we've got Heath MacDonald, Gord McNeilly, Karla Bernard, Sidney MacEwen, Cory Deagle, and myself, Michele Beaton, as members of the Public Accounts Committee for this Assembly.

So the intent of our first meeting is to review and work towards a work plan for what we'd like to achieve going forward starting when we want to meet on a regular basis. There have been a lot of documents provided to you and we do have an agenda.

If you had a chance to review the agenda, I'll just ask for an adoption if anybody would like to motion.

So we have Heath MacDonald. Do we have a seconder?

**Unidentified Voice:** You don't need one.

**Chair:** No, I don't need one for this. Okay.

Oh, it's not required.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Thank you.

All right, so first on the agenda would be we received an offer from the Auditor General for orientation around the Auditor General's role and the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation which I'll refer to as CAAF going forward.

The recommendation would be for orientation training.

I guess the first question would be does the committee agree to accept the training from the Auditor General and CAAF?

**Mr. McNeilly:** I'd like the training, for sure.

**Chair:** Okay, perfect. So yes, I think everybody's in favour of that.

I think we'll let that agenda be set by the Auditor General, and the other recommendation was that it be done in camera. So we would do that off in camera, not recorded and so I would need an acceptance or if we want to have any conversation about or everybody agrees that we'll do that in camera?

So if you want some background, some of the information that was handed out – packages that were handed out, there was two of them handed out: one on good practices for effective Public Accounts committees, and then also measuring accountability.

So you have that and that'd be a little bit of background on what CAAF is and we would be covering more of that in-depth in our training sessions.

So any questions or comments on that section? Carry on? Just move right along, I don't need to ask? Okay, that's easy.

All right, so we'll cover off number four on our agenda: other items for the committee's work plan. So you'll see in front of you there are two Auditor General reports.

The larger one is the 2019 report which was issued I believe April. They also have the petroleum product pricing review which was issued in December of 2018, so neither of these has been reviewed by the Public Accounts committee yet.

So I will put forward a recommendation that we look at covering those two reports as part of our initial work plan and if anybody has anything else that they would like to discuss or put forward as items for our work plan for this first section, you can go ahead and do so.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Which one of these should be priority?

**Chair:** In my opinion as we are coming out of the training session, I think it would be best for us to go through the Auditor General report to the Legislative Assembly first and then follow that up by the petroleum pricing. I would think that would be a good order to go through. Then we have the Auditor General's training fresh in our minds.

The Legislative Assembly report will, I think, take us a longer time to go through so it would be nice to get off the agenda first, I think. So that would be my recommendation.

**Mr. Deagle:** How long does that usually take?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Sorry, Chair.

**Chair:** Sorry?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Those two items would likely carry us throughout the summer I would think, along with the training in front of the Auditor General. Would that be sufficient, Clerk, in that regard, do you think, based on your experience or –

**Chair:** So I think in section six we're going to talk about scheduling. So I should have said in the very beginning – sorry about that, Ryan.

I'm going to go back because I should've, when I called it to order, just kind of the rules around, if you wait so that for Hansard I can say your name just so they'll be able to capture that. It is pretty informal so we refer to each other by our names or as Clerk; however Ryan decides that he wants to be referred to.

We do have a section on scheduling, Heath, that we can talk about that through, because there is one other report. The blue books will be scheduled to come out in October so that would be another piece of business that if we can get to that prior to our next sitting – I know it's an aggressive work plan but we can talk about our scheduling and how we can maybe get through that workload.

Does anybody have any other suggestions of items that we should cover off in, I guess, the next four or five months?

**Mr. McNeilly:** Just a quick question: How long would the training be? Are we talking, from the Auditor General, a couple of days or are we talking over the span – probably want to get that done very quickly. I don't know about the time frames, just a question.

**Chair:** I'm going to let Ryan take this one.

**Clerk Assistant:** It can be done in one session, but the main thing is the Auditor General would like to do it jointly with CAAF, and CAAF is in Ottawa and they come down for it. So probably just the one session where CAAF is present and the AG and then if there's further orientation that the committee wants from the AG, subsequent sessions could be scheduled; but I would suggest that if the committee committed to, say, a block of three hours for this orientation session, that should give enough time for both. But like I say, again, we could have a subsequent with the AG if necessary, just CAAF is kind of a one-time opportunity.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Yeah, okay, thank you.

**Mr. Deagle:** Good answer.

**Chair:** Any other questions?

**Mr. Deagle:** I know the committee and their last work plan in February, one of their top priorities was housing. I don't know, is that something that –?

**Chair:** So the purpose of the PAC, Public Accounts Committee is to do oversight on basically the financials of the government and then for housing that would be covered under that specific standing committee, so there is a standing committee – what's it called, Ryan?

**Mr. Deagle:** I just know it was on their work plan so –

**Chair:** On PAC's work plan or –

**Mr. Deagle:** Yeah.

**Chair:** Interesting, do you have that?

**Clerk Assistant:** Yeah, the previous Public Accounts committee did want to look at housing.

You're right, housing would fall under the mandate of I think the committee on health and social development. That's not to say the Public Accounts committee can't look into other matters that fall generally within fiscal management, the Public Accounts, the province, the reports of the Auditor General.

One thing with Public Accounts committee is generally it's recommended to take a focus on the administration of government policy, rather than the merits of government policy, which might be kind of a different approach from the other committees.

So, for example, with housing the Public Accounts committee would be encouraged to look at how housing policies are carried out within a department as opposed to why the housing policies are what they are.

Does that summarize kind of –

**Chair:** Cory Deagle.

**Mr. Deagle:** It was just something that, like, I know both parties had asked quite a few questions on, and it's probably a crisis situation right now.

It wasn't – I'm not saying we have to look into it. Maybe it is something better suited for that committee; but it was just, I saw it on the work plan when I looked back so I don't know if it was something that we want to look into on Public Accounts or not, but –

**Chair:** So, Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** I think I would agree, too, that it would become, like, if you look at the Auditor General's report and they're talking about early childhood and there's org charts and stuff maybe we should have it as a priority to make sure that that section of our government is we're keeping them to account.

I think that's probably an important focus, too.

**Chair:** So I'm going to ask Ryan if you can just kind of give an overview of the Auditor General report and how it's selected and what the Auditor General actually does an audit on and when maybe do you recall when the last housing audit might have been completed?

I'm wondering if it would be in any of the work plans that we have, action plans in the Auditor General report?

**Clerk Assistant:** Well, the Auditor General – each annual report of the Auditor General is kind of in two broad sections. There's

special audits, also known as performance audits, and then there's financial auditing. The performance audits cover specific areas of government that the Auditor General has audited recently in that year. Those could be individual offices, programs, you name it.

The Auditor General selects which areas to audit in that regard, but does take feedback from the Public Accounts committee, the audit committee as well. Usually there's three or four such performance audits every year.

In terms of housing – I'm sorry, my memory fails me at the moment, but it feels to me like there was not too long ago some kind of an audit on housing, but it wouldn't be all the full scope of the housing issue across the province, it would be government policies towards housing within whatever department was responsible for it at the time.

The other side of the Auditor General's report is financial audit. The Auditor General looks at the Public Accounts of the province each year and publishes an audit opinion on those Public Accounts, whether they fairly represent the financial position of the province.

That's my overview. The Auditor General herself will give you a much better description when she's here for an orientation session of the book of her office.

Does that answer your question?

**Chair:** Yes, so as per Cory's suggestion we could put it on our work plan and kind of formulate our plan around how we want to discuss it and what we want to look at from a policy standard.

Does that work for you, Cory?

**Mr. Deagle:** Yes.

**Chair:** Okay, Karla Bernard.

**Ms. Bernard:** I love that idea of putting housing on the work plan so that we can look at it with as many different lenses as we can.

I'd be curious to know, had they started that work or was it just on the work plan for upcoming committee meetings?

**Clerk Assistant:** Do you want me to take that, Chair?

**Chair:** Sure.

**Clerk Assistant:** They didn't get started on it. They had several other things on their work plan in the last assembly, and housing was essentially the next thing up, but then the election was called. So that put an end to it all.

But they were also – The committee was looking at how it operates as a committee, kind of its own internal practices and procedures.

I believe they also were planning on looking at the petroleum pricing report and most likely the annual report that just came out in March, just essentially just before the election was called.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you.

I will add that any of us can also sit in on those because they're public meetings, right? As members we can sit on those, and we can put forward recommendations that that gets added to the work plan as well as that committee. So I have added housing.

Does anybody have anything else that they would like to add to the work plan?

Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

Immigration is one I want to get into. I jotted down a few notes I sent in to the officer, to print something off, and I just want to read this off: Increasing and sustaining population growth and retention has been an ongoing issue for government, and the province's immigration programs have been key to those efforts.

The financial impact of government on immigration programs has been significant, and the spinoff effects of these programs have had – and the spinoff that these

programs have had on issues like housing, class sizes and composition, access to health care and rural community development are complex and they're growing.

We know what happened with the Sherwood Motel talk of last year, how people are using the rules to their advantage, so to speak, right now; or the attempt to try and help rural PEI in the last number of years by adding that component of rural PEI, which was a good effort, but we've heard of our rural municipalities saying, CEOs saying how much time and effort it took as far as recruiting with using the PNP and that type of thing. We know that we didn't see the success that we had wanted to.

So you know a big issue right now is the economic impact to PEI and the changes that we've made to our immigration programs. How is that going to affect, do you know what I mean, the housing crisis?

Obviously that played into it, to some aspect. If we're limiting that or if the numbers are stagnant or if they're going down, how is that going to play into things? Maybe it'll help. I don't know.

Given all of that, I think our committee should look at gaining a better understanding of where our immigration programs are now, where we want it to be and how do we get there while addressing the spinoff challenges that we previously mentioned.

I would recommend our committee maybe ask the clerk to approach the minister and get them to suggest who we start with, with the presentation of exactly that, where we're at now and where we're going with them, if the committee is agreeable.

**Chair:** Thanks, Sidney.

Does anybody have any comments on that or is everybody in favour of taking that through as well as another subject? Okay.

Thank you, Sidney.

**Clerk Assistant:** I will –

**Chair:** Go ahead, Ryan Reddin.

**Clerk Assistant:** I will say one thing. Immigration does fall under specifically the committee on education and economic growth, just so the committee's aware. It's in the mandate.

**Chair:** Okay, and so we would be looking at it from an overarching, similar to housing and the impacts, but the actual –

**Clerk Assistant:** If the committee wishes.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Chair?

**Clerk Assistant:** Yes, Heath Macdonald.

**Mr. MacDonald:** So, Clerk, just to be clear, we have a mandate here basically to deal with the financial aspects of government. So what's venturing off into these other areas? What's that do to our scheduling, which we're going to get to I guess, or timing or priorities, based on the mandate for this committee?

**Chair:** Ryan Reddin.

**Clerk Assistant:** Well, the committee sets its priorities and schedules essentially. You had asked earlier about how much time does it take to review the Auditor General's report.

It takes, I would say, four or five meetings typically. It can be longer. It can be slightly shorter than that. Generally, the Auditor General will go through particularly her performance audits in detail with the committee, and the committee members generally have quite a few questions on those, and then there's follow-up work that may come out of those.

So the committee can essentially add whatever it wants within its mandate to its work plan, and establish its priorities accordingly; but it might also want to think about timeframes with the committee has to report to the Legislative Assembly from time to time. We usually suggest once per year. So how much work could the committee get done before it next reports to the Assembly is a consideration; and, yeah, it's really up to the committee, I guess.

**Chair:** Gord McNeilly?

**Mr. McNeilly:** Oh, (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Oh, sorry.

Heath Macdonald, go ahead.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yeah, because I'm just thinking of what you said relevant to having the Auditor General do the training, three hours there or two sessions because of the FCC or – not FCC –

**Clerk Assistant:** CAAF.

**Chair:** CAAF.

**Mr. MacDonald:** – CAAF coming in. We're up to likely 10 meetings, 10 weeks, unless we're doing it twice a week.

**Chair:** Well, and I think this meeting we've scheduled for an hour, but I think when we get into our regular scheduled meetings we would extend that out to two to three hours.

We had originally talked, Ryan and I, and we'll put that forward to the committee to see how they feel about it. We had kind of discussed having it as two hours, but booking it out three hours, if we need it, so we're not cutting off witnesses. So that would kind of give us more ability.

Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Just because I'm new and everything, did the Auditor General do an audit on the PNP? Was that done?

**Chair:** Ryan Reddin.

**Clerk Assistant:** I think a number of years ago there was some aspect of the Provincial Nominee Program, yes, was audited. I can't quote you the year.

**Chair:** Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Sorry, Chair, just an interjection.

The report was 2009 based on the 2008 happenings of that year, to be polite.

**Chair:** Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** And I was just thinking like maybe it's something that we bring up with the Auditor General to figure out, you know, a new course.

I don't mind that, but I just don't want to bog down the committee if it should go to another committee or can we give a recommendation from this committee to another committee that it would be of importance to – you know, the Public Accounts committee is interested in you looking into this

**Chair:** Ryan Reddin.

**Clerk Assistant:** Yes, sometimes one committee will write a letter to another committee to recommend that or request that that other committee look into something. It is ultimately that other committee's decision whether to do so or not.

Individual members can also do that. Any member can write to the chair of any committee and ask that committee to look into some subject.

**Chair:** Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Because I think it's important to get it on record and to work with that, but being new I just didn't know if this was the right committee.

I would maybe like to make a request to the Auditor General to get briefed on portions of the immigration file and when she's here doing her report as a starting point, but –

**Chair:** Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thanks, Chair.

I don't think it'd be fair to ask the Auditor General that, because she wouldn't have an updated, you know, of what's going on.

Let me rephrase what I was trying to get at. I'm not looking for a deep dive into PNP at this committee. What I'm looking for is the significant financial impacts that that program has played on our finances.

The former finance minister, and actually the minister in charge now that I think of it of immigration would know, you know we have \$100 million plus in deposits sitting with the province or the significant tax revenue that this has brought. It's not insignificant to say that this has played a big part in balancing our budget over the past number of years.

We have made changes in this past year, over these past two years, and where that's going to leave us financially as a province – like, are we going to keep being guaranteed those revenues or those deposits to keep us in a good situation or do we actually have to look at serious program change because that revenue simply won't be there going forward.

I mean, we've made changes within the program to be able to invest in real estate. Well, if we cancelled that going forward, how does that affect our bottom line?

It's all in the aspect of the actual Public Accounts and where we're going to be financially as a province is why I want to bring somebody in to talk about that.

**Chair:** Any more questions?

Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** I would just say that as a new person, I'm just trying to figure out how we can keep this – that's a massive, massive file and it's of importance, but I want to make sure that we're being efficient with this committee and other committees as well.

**Chair:** Okay, perfect.

And so I've added to our other matters that we can bring up and then we can look at who we would bring in as witnesses under that subject.

So thanks for bringing that forward, Sidney.

Any other items that we'd want to bring forward at this point in time? This is just initially because we can obviously bring forward other items.

Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Can we talk about, as a committee, the ministerial mandate letters potentially giving direction from the ministers or giving direction from the Premier to the ministers about what their units are doing so that we can get some clarity in what their vision is in each of the departments?

So that's what I want to bring forward.

**Chair:** Thank you, Gord.

Question to Ryan: Would that be something that the committee would write a letter to, would it be the Premier's Office or to request so that we understand?

**Clerk Assistant:** Yes, the committee could certainly write to the Premier's Office to ask for mandate letters along the lines that you just described.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Interjection.

**Chair:** Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

Yeah the committee can ask for an update on it, it's happening. So we can say: When are you going to send them? I guess. Or you could just email the Premier and ask him, too.

As a committee, we could send an official request to ask when each minister will receive a mandate letter, yeah.

**Chair:** I think that's fair if we're going to call witnesses, then we would – I guess we probably know who it falls under anyway; but we can take that back and if the committee is agreeable to send it on behalf of the committee, then I think we can do that.

Is everybody agreeable to that? Yeah? Okay.

So I have on our other matters list: housing, immigration and just I made a note of PNP audit, just an update or a – I guess kind of more or less, Gord, looking for an overall what was the audit, what was shown in the audit, and possibly what would come up next from that?

**Mr. McNeilly:** I don't want to slow our process down. It's to update it for sure, but –

**Mr. MacDonald:** Chair?

**Chair:** Heath MacDonald.

**Mr. MacDonald:** It would be interesting to bring in your immigration people and have them do a presentation; that might clarify some of the issues around immigration.

**Chair:** Okay, good recommendation. So under witnesses, then we can add that as one of our items. Perfect. Okay.

Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thanks.

I think that's a good idea. With all due respect, Gord, I don't want to bring in someone or get an opinion on the 2009 AG report. I don't want to – I think that would bog us down with – we get into stuff that's 10 years old. It's dealt with. What's happened has happened, unfortunately.

I want to know going forward how it's going to affect our finances in the province. Don't get me wrong. I could call a list of witnesses as long as – it could keep us here for two years going back that far.

**Mr. McNeilly:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** But I like that idea of getting an update where we're at, but especially the financial situation that it's bringing to the province and where we expect it to go in the next five years.

**Chair:** Future path.

Okay, Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** That just started with my initial question of when the last report was. I didn't realize it was that long ago.

So, yeah, I agree with you.

**Chair:** Agreed.

I think when you say 2008 you don't think that's very long ago, but when you think about it, it's 11 years ago.

**Mr. Deagle:** Holy cow.

**Chair:** He was in high school.

So is everybody in favour of those items? So housing and immigration and I will roll PNP into the update on immigration?

Everybody in favour?

Going forward, if you have any other items to add, then simply you can just send me an email and we'll add it on to our list.

So that covers off item 4.

Number 5 will review correspondence. So does anybody have any correspondence that might have been sent to you regarding the Public Accounts Committee? No?

This will be an item we'll maintain in the agenda going forward. I do not have anything. Ryan does not have anything.

**Clerk Assistant:** Just the letter from the Auditor General.

**Chair:** Which we reviewed under item number – yes.

We'll move on, then, to discussion of scheduling. So I'll just open this up by saying that Ryan and I had a quick count of the weeks that we had before the next sitting.

So I guess this is up to the committee if we want to meet over the summer or if we want to wait until we get into September. I kind of will leave that up for discussion amongst the committee so we can decide a starting point.

From that starting point, we can decide if we're meeting weekly, if we're meeting twice a month, monthly?

As we all know we have a large list on our plan, so to get through it, it might make sense for us to meet weekly so that we can get through some topics, but we're not dealing with cold storage either. I think that's important.

I will put that out to everybody to see if we want to – first question I'll ask: Would we want to start now or would we want to wait?

We'd have to manage with the Auditor General when she can first come in and arrange to have CAAF to come meet with us. I think that would be the recommendation.

Ryan, I will let you speak to that.

**Clerk Assistant:** Yeah, I do know that for the Auditor General, I don't think is going to

be available immediately. More likely, I think, mid-August at the earliest for her and CAAF actually probably wouldn't be available until September.

**Chair:** We looked at the initial dates. It seems like Wednesday would work for everybody. Even if we were to meet during the sitting this would work within our schedule of the sitting if we happen to have to meet in-between; so at approximately 10:00 a.m. on a Wednesday.

Would everybody be okay maintaining 10:00 a.m. Wednesday's for our PAC meetings? Everybody in agreement?

**Mr. Deagle:** Can we do 9 a.m.?

**Chair:** Can we do 9:00 a.m.?

**Mr. MacEwen:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** I'll put out 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m.? What would be the most comfortable for people to the meet? I know some people are travelling.

Yes, go ahead, Sidney.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Earlier the better is fine with me, but I would suggest to the committee that sometimes you might need a substitute for your meetings and that substitute might be coming from Tignish or farther away.

**Chair:** That's fair.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I know in past, typically we don't do much earlier than 10:00 a.m. because you've got to travel two hours to get here or perhaps a minister or a guest, it's somewhat fair to them not to expect them to leave that early.

But whatever the committee wants to do, I guess. Earlier is fine for me, but I just know about past, when we had members coming from Tignish and Alberton, it was out of respect to them to not come earlier, but I'm all in favour of earlier the better.

**Chair:** That's a good point.

I guess what we could always do is we could maintain it at 9:00 a.m. But if we have a witness that's not able to meet at 9:00 a.m.,

we could always delay our start until 10:00 a.m. to accommodate their schedule, and we would know that in advance. Or, we could also put them on the agenda at a point in which they would be able to coordinate schedules.

So is everybody in favour of 9:00 a.m. start and we'll schedule it for 3 hours and that would not be a concrete end date. If we finish before 12:00 noon, then we would wrap up – we won't keep people longer than they need to be kept, but it also gives us a good working session, I think.

So everybody is in favour? I see heads, yeah? So 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Wednesdays? Looking at the calendar, the first Wednesday if my memory serves me correct, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September which would be prior to school starting. When I look around the room, it might be a good idea for us to start the second week in September, if everybody would be in favour for that?

**Clerk Assistant:** It's actually the 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Chair:** It's the 4<sup>th</sup>, yeah, so still before, so maybe on the 11<sup>th</sup>, September 11<sup>th</sup> being our first meeting?

Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Is the AG ready to roll the last week of August?

**Clerk Assistant:** I can't say. I don't have access to her exact schedule. I just know she's not available in early August. I could ask her.

**Chair:** How about we take a recommendation that we will confer with the Auditor General to see what she is available for in August.

Cory Deagle.

**Mr. Deagle:** I was going to say if we can start mid-August and we can get through it, but it depends if she's available or not.

**Chair:** Ryan, can I ask you to check with the Auditor General to see when she can start?

**Clerk Assistant:** Sure, yeah.

**Chair:** Then that would be an in-camera session. We could do our training sessions prior to doing an official start, then, in September.

Is everybody in favour of going weekly until we get through what the priorities of the committee would be? So we do a weekly session, Wednesdays 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon?

Okay, thank you.

We will work on that start date and get back to the committee on when the Auditor General would be available; but I think it's important that the first session would be training for us all as this is – we're all newcomers to this committee.

Ryan Reddin.

**Clerk Assistant:** Sorry, one other thing to point out, too, is the conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and the Council of Legislative Auditors is August 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> and the AG would be attending that, as would our Chair and Vice Chair and myself, so that week would likely be out.

It's also a consideration, too, that it may be useful for the orientation session to follow that conference, too, because then you'd have a couple of members bringing back their learning from the conference, so – but I can check into – there is one week following that, the August 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, if maybe on the 28<sup>th</sup> would be the Wednesday to see if that would be a possibility.

**Chair:** So – sorry to interrupt – I'm away that week on another conference.

**Clerk Assistant:** Oh, okay.

**Chair:** So I would not be here on the 29<sup>th</sup>, unless the Vice Chair wanted to take the first meeting. That would be my issue there. I'm away on both of those conferences; but there is the opportunity to start on the 4<sup>th</sup> if we would like to start on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

So we'll take that away, and Ryan and I will work on what our start date will be, based on the availability of the Auditor General and then we'll get back to everybody on the committee.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I'm okay with, Chair, you directing that. You should be here for the first ones –

**Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. MacEwen:** – and so, based on your schedule and the auditor's schedule, just (Indistinct) them going, and if we can't go till then, that's fine.

**Chair:** Perfect. We will work on that.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Sure.

**Chair:** I just realized that we have a number of things on our priority – on the list, on our planning list. So I just want to skip back to number 4 for a second and prioritize things.

Because if we start on September 11<sup>th</sup>, we'd essentially have about nine weeks, so nine meetings in order to get us to the next sitting. I think that we would all agree that we probably wouldn't want to meet during the sitting unless it's absolutely necessary.

So going through the list, if the training session only takes one meeting, if the Auditor General report takes four to five meetings, then we'd be up to six. Would we want to prioritize the petroleum product pricing report before bringing in – there's a recommendation that we bring the comptroller in to give us training on the blue books before the blue books are produced in October.

Ryan, I'm going to ask how long you would think a report that size would take the committee to review?

**Clerk Assistant:** Again, it really varies based on how much focus the committee has on it, but it is a thinner report. I would think it wouldn't take quite as long to go through the contents of the report. That said, petroleum product pricing can be a complex subject, too, so –

**Chair:** Okay.

**Clerk Assistant:** I wouldn't think it would take as long as the annual report, certainly.

**Chair:** So would it be fair if we set one meeting for it, and then if we need a follow-up meeting, we can schedule that as prior to

the training session, or going through the blue books and we can finish it off?

Would everybody be in favour that we put this in between, the petroleum product pricing review, in between the Legislative Assembly report and the blue books? Would that fit into the schedules or would somebody like to prioritize something else before that?

**Mr. Deagle:** I think we should get that out of the way.

**Chair:** And then we can check that box off. Okay, so we'll prioritize the petroleum product pricing as number two.

That would bring us to around the timing – and I'm not sure what you have in your calendar – but that brings us into October for sure, and October is when it would be scheduled to have the blue books out, so I think it's beneficial that we would all have a training session with the comptroller on the blue books before they come out.

And then which would – in your estimation, would you think, Ryan, that that would be about one session?

**Clerk Assistant:** Yeah, I believe in the past when the committee has had the comptroller in, it's just been a single session.

**Chair:** So that would bring us up to seven meetings, eight meetings with the comptroller training and then we would look at starting the blue books.

If we prioritize the blue books before anything else, I think that would bring us to really our regular sittings and then we would probably address it at that point in time once we get through. We'll talk about what the next priorities would be at that point in time? Or would you like to prioritize housing and immigration into our plan at this point in time as possibly number 4 and number 5? And which one would come first?

**Mr. MacEwen:** Chair?

**Chair:** Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thanks.

I would suggest waiting, because there could be other committees take on significant things, perhaps over the two – the special committees, you know, when they're starting to be looking at a basic income or poverty maybe there's some aspect there, or once ministers have mandate letters there could be a whole lot more change in the next couple of months before we get to those priorities.

**Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I would suggest revisiting the order, anyway, or – and maybe something, who knows, might pop up in the next four or five months that trump tops it all, so –

**Chair:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacDonald:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** What's that?

**Chair:** Heath Macdonald.

**Mr. MacDonald:** No, I mean –

**Chair:** Just a comment, yeah.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I totally agree with Sidney. I think we're going to have – our agenda seems pretty full from – just based on what I'm looking at, and then to add to it, I think maybe something may come up that – like a pharmacare or something like that, that we may want to stick our nose into.

**Chair:** Okay. I would agree.

So we will leave it at those three priorities, including training for the additional two.

Everybody sounds like they're in agreement? I'll just get some nods. Yes. Okay.

**Mr. McNeilly:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Gord McNeilly.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Is this committee in the past, if we do get bogged down and we find that once a week is not enough for our agenda, has this committee in the past ever scheduled auxiliary meetings or further meetings to get through the workload?

**Chair:** I can take that. It's up to us.

**Clerk Assistant:** It is, yeah.

**Chair:** Isn't that what Ryan's going to say? It is up to us, and if we decide that we want to meet twice a week, then that would be up to the committee to say: Let's meet twice a week if we have that amount of business to do. So we'd be completely open to that, if we want to meet twice a week.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Yeah, well –

**Mr. Deagle:** You're the Chair, so you can call a meeting whenever you want.

**Chair:** Yeah. Sorry.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Not that – you know, just a question, I just wanted to get a kind of a sense of what the committee's done, what the schedule's been like in the last four or five years, you know, instead of having so much pressure on us to get through the work that we want to –

**Chair:** Yeah. Ryan?

**Clerk Assistant:** I don't recall an instance of Public Accounts having two meetings per week, but there was a period where they were meeting very frequently. It is certainly possible. There's absolutely nothing forbidding the committee from meeting as frequently as it wants.

**Chair:** I will add that there will be in-between meetings, there will probably be a requirement for us to do some reading, do some research; but as the Chair of the committee, I can call it when – so if we agree as a committee that we think that we need to meet more regularly than that, then I'm absolutely open to doing that.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Any other questions?

I'll go to item number 7 which is new business.

Does anybody have new business that they would like to bring up? We might have covered it already under the other items? Okay. I don't hear.

So on that, I will ask for somebody to motion to adjourn.

**Mr. MacDonald:** So moved.

**Chair:** Heath Macdonald has motioned to adjourn.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Carried! Look at that.

Did I miss anything?

**Clerk Assistant:** No, just rap the gavel.

**Chair:** Oh, hit that – there we go.

Awesome; thanks, guys –

**Mr. Deagle:** Good first meeting.

**Chair:** – and gal.

Good first meeting.

The Committee adjourned