

Third Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Chairperson
Mr. Leonard Derkach
Constituency of Russell

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

TIME – 7 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell)

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Jennifer Howard
(Fort Rouge)**

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Mr. Selinger

*Mr. Borotsik, Ms. Braun, Messrs. Caldwell,
Derkach, Ms. Howard, Messrs. Maguire,
Martindale, Ms. Selby, Mrs. Stefanson*

APPEARING:

Hon. Dave Chomiak, MLA for Kildonan

Hon. Gord Mackintosh, MLA for St. Johns

*Ms. Carol Bellringer, Auditor General of
Manitoba*

*Mr. Jeff Schnoor, Deputy Minister of Justice and
Deputy Attorney General*

*Mr. Martin Billinkoff, Deputy Minister of Family
Services and Housing*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

*Auditor General's Report—Follow-Up of Report
Recommendation—A Review, dated July 2005*

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Will the committee please come to order. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Before we get started, there are a few preliminary matters that I would like to deal with, and the first is that tonight we're having a video taken of this committee, and this is for the, the—I'm sorry. Yeah, this is for film—for those proceedings for the inclusion in the video standing committees of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. So that's what this is all about.

And, secondly, we have changed the format of seating tonight on a trial basis. And I would like the committee's tolerance to allow us to try this for tonight, where we will have the witnesses that are

before the committee sit at the end of the table, so that their staff can be with them at the end of table. The deputy minister can then invite his or her staff to the table rather than what we had here in the past where the deputy minister always had to be sliding his chair back to consult with staff. This way we want the staff to come and to be able to consult with the deputy right at the table.

In addition to that, of course, we're not excluding the minister from sitting at the end of the table either. And so we're going to try this to see whether or not there's a comfort level in dealing with committee this way, and if there is not, we will then, as a committee, regroup and perhaps revert to the old format.

You will note that, at the head of the table, we have not only myself as Chair, we have the Clerk of our committees. We have the Vice-Chair of our committee, and we have the Auditor at the head of the table, with her staff joining her as well.

So, if there are no objections to this, we will proceed or, perhaps, I can leave it open for just a minute for comments that people may want to put on the record in this regard. Hearing none, then I will assume that we can proceed.

One of the things that we had also discussed at the skeer—steering committee level was the issue of preparing a guide for our deputy ministers to use in preparing themselves for committee. And I think in our informal discussions it was agreed that we would proceed with having our Clerk of committees, along with our researcher, prepare a draft guide that could be shared with deputies; but, understanding that, that will have to, first of all, be approved by the committee here before it can proceed to be distributed to deputies.

So are there any comments in that regard? If not, is it agreed that we should proceed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: Agreed. Thank you so very much.

Tonight's meeting on Public Accounts has been called to consider the Auditor General's Report—

Follow-Up of Report Recommendations—A Review, dated July 2005.

Before we get started, are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long this committee should sit this evening?

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): I recommend that we follow our normal procedure and sit till 9 o'clock, but, given the beautiful weather, no one should feel obliged to keep us here till 9 o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Any other recommendations?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I would agree with Mr. Martindale, other than I would add that until we pass the report, if it's passed earlier.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, thank you for that. Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: Agreed. Are there any suggestions as to the order in which we should consider the various sections of this report?

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): I—in discussions, we had agreed to have the ministers and deputies of Justice and Family Services here, so as to avoid calling everybody who's involved in the follow-up report—so perhaps we could just look at those sections that have to deal with those two ministers, and I'm open to which order. Perhaps we could have Justice first and then Family Services.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: So I would invite the Deputy Minister of Justice, along with his staff, and the minister to come forward. Thank you so very much, and there are seats at the front for staff as well.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I just want to introduce the totality of the staff tonight, the Deputy Minister Jeff Schnoor.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much and welcome to this committee.

First of all, I'm going to ask, as we have previously changed our format slightly, we would invite the deputy minister, Mr. Schnoor, for some—oh, pardon me. Before we get to that step, we usually start with the Auditor General. So I'm going to ask whether the Auditor General would like to make

some opening comments on this report, on this section.

Ms. Carol Bellringer (Auditor General of Manitoba): Mr. Chair, could I make a few opening comments just on our whole follow-up process?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes.

Ms. Bellringer: Okay, then I will do that.

And what we do, what we did in '05 and what we continue to do as a practice in Manitoba is conduct a review rather than an audit when we're looking at the follow-up of a previously issued audit. And what a review is it's what we consider, and these are accounting—or auditing terms rather, a moderate, not a high level of assurance around the status that's provided. What we have now moved towards is a follow-up that takes place. It's not cast in stone, but generally it takes place three years after a report's been issued, and then we continue to follow it up every year thereafter until all of the recommendations are fully implemented or resolved. And we would consider something where an alternative to the original recommendation was proposed and we thought that that did address the risk area, that that would be something that we would consider to be resolved.

The department or agency that we've audited provides us with a status report, and we consider that self-assessment. Where there's been an implementation of a recommendation, we'll actually do a little bit more work than we do for those things that remain in progress, and we'll look at backup documentation just to support the plausibility of a statement that they've made. As I say, it's not a full audit, but we do do some work and we have ongoing discussions with the department to understand what they've done. Sometimes there's a difference of opinion between what we were intending and what they—how they had interpreted it. So that discussion is quite important.

Each of the departments and agencies that are submitting the status reports will tell us whether or not the recommendation's been implemented or resolved, whether, for some reason, it could be a change in program. Sometimes there's a dissolution of a particular program, that the action's no longer required.

When a department or agency doesn't intend to implement the recommendation because, for some reason, there's been either a misunderstanding, even when the recommendation was written, and that

there's other things that we should have considered, or there could be conditions that have changed, they'll tell us they don't intend to implement it, and then that's the communication we give to the Legislature in our follow-up reports so that you can understand how it's progressed to that point. They'll tell us whether it's in progress or whether they haven't yet done anything to resolve the recommendation but they do plan to take action.

So back to the '05 report. It actually covered 11 different audit reports. And I just would refer the committee to page 3 of that '05 status report to see what all of the—there is a little chart that summarizes the status of each of those recommendations.

The Department of Justice reports that are included in there, there's one on maintenance enforcement and that is a report that originally was issued in the autumn of 1997. There is a second report—and then some of those recommendations remain outstanding so I'll leave that one with the committee to follow up the status on those as of today.

The office of the Public Trustee report that was originally issued in the spring of '98, in the '05 follow-up report, all of the recommendations in that particular audit had already been implemented. And it was—it had to do with—and the conclusion that we had written in that report, excuse me, was that, while the Public Trustee had taken some specific actions which had improved internal control practices, certain of the controls over the management of the trust account should be further strengthened to provide adequate assurance of the validity and appropriateness of trust account expenditures, and then the recommendations which flowed from that had all been implemented.

* (19:10)

And the third report is on the Fine Option program. The original audit was issued in March of 2001, and there were a, a, a number of recommendations at that point that had not yet been, been implemented.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much. Does the Deputy Minister, Mr. Schnoor, have an opening statement?

Mr. Jeff Schnoor (Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General): Yes, I'll, I'll make a few opening comments.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Mr. Schnoor: As you'll note, I, I am the only official from the department here. I decided to be charitable towards departmental staff, in part, because all of the recommendations from two out of the three reports, as I'll indicate momentarily, have been fully implemented. So I believe I'll be able to answer all the committee's questions.

So, again, thank you for the opportunity to come and provide you with an update on the 2005 follow-up report from the Auditor General.

Minister Chomiak suggested that I be brief in my comments, and I always take his counsel. I will say, beginning with the Maintenance Enforcement Program report, the department has been actively working towards addressing the recommendations of the 1997 report, and all but one of the 18 recommendations have been acted upon within the limits of the Maintenance Enforcement Program's current information system. Further information is contingent upon replacing that information system.

So I'll give you a—just a bit of information about some of the activities taken up until about 2004-2005, as, as set out in the, in the follow-up report. So I'll just indicate that in 2005, after considering alternatives from other provinces and considering the possibility of developing its own system, MEP, the Maintenance Enforcement Program, determined that the Alberta MEP program, known as MIMS, would best meet the needs of Manitoba with modifications to adjust for Manitoba's legislative requirements and business needs.

In 2006, a GAAP and technical assessment was done that confirmed that the system was a good fit for Manitoba, and approval was received later that year to acquire and make modifications to the Alberta MIMS system.

Now in 2007, Alberta undertook a significant software upgrade to its, to its system, and that posed a dilemma for us; continue with the adaptation of the existing Alberta system or await the completion of the upgrade. And it was decided, in consultation with the ICT Services Manitoba, to do the latter, to wait for the completion of the upgrade. Now this did result in some delay, but in our view it ultimately saved the additional work of attempting to make the same upgrades in Manitoba, and saved costs associated with making those upgrades that I've been told would have amounted to something in the neighbourhood of about a million dollars. So time was not entirely lost while we waited for the upgrade, though. MEP continued to work diligently

on the documentation of Manitoba's business processes, which is important in the implementation of the system.

As a result of an RFP, a vendor contract is now in place for the first of two phases of the project, with an anticipated completion date of the first phase of October, 2009. The full project is anticipated to be completed in 2010 or 2011, bearing in mind that some legislative changes may be needed.

With respect to the Fine Option program, essentially I'll, in the interest of brevity, indicate that all of the recommendations have been implemented since the 2005 report. Processes have been put in place to ensure that placements are appropriate for individuals with convictions for more serious offences. Violence, arson, for example; they're called special placements. And processes, processes have been put in place for regular cyclical reviews of all of the community resource centres. And, as the auditor's indicated, the public trustee recommendations were already implemented at the time of the 2005 report, so I don't have anything to add there. So I'll stop at that point.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Schnoor. The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Howard: I'd be interested to hear a little bit more about the information technology system in the mat—in the Maintenance Enforcement Program, and, I guess, kind of what the expectations of that system will be, how it's going to improve the program, if there is some—what the value of that new system is gonna be for the people who are relying on, on that money, that maintenance enforcement money?

Floor Comment: Well, as you say—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Schnoor.

Mr. Schnoor: Sorry. I'm sorry. You know I always observe that other committees and people mo—get ahead of the Chair, and I'm sorry I've done it myself.

Mr. Chairperson: That's okay.

Mr. Schnoor: Thank you.

As you say, a substantial number of Manitobans do rely on the Maintenance Enforcement Program, over 15,000 individuals, and the program collects and disperses in the neighbourhood of \$50 million a year. So quite a lot is at stake.

The program that, that the, that Maintenance Enforcement Program now has is very, very outdated. It, it's based on a—and I won't get too

technical—but it's based on a lang—computer language called Clipper that is outdated, and the program is, the system is, therefore, at risk of failure.

The—a new program that we're adopting from Alberta will essentially implement all of the recommendations that you see in the Auditor General's report and will fully automate the systems that the Maintenance Enforcement Program has.

It's, it's much more than an accounting system—and, of course, it is an accounting system, but it's much more than that. It's also what I call a work, a work assignment and fulfillment system. It, it will direct the staff of the Maintenance Enforcement Program that a particular action is required at a particular time and ensure that the action gets taken and flagged to management if the action does not get taken.

Letters will be automatically generated. We'll have the ability to have direct deposit and debit to and from accounts, which is something that the program's not capable of doing, and, honestly, on and on, it will be a thoroughly modern system and allow us to get away from a lot of the manual processes that currently exist.

Ms. Howard: And so the completion time frame for this is 2011. Is that—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Schnoor.

Mr. Schnoor: Well, we hope for sooner than that. The, the, the current phase that we're in with the contractor that we have, CGI Information Systems, they're the same company that developed the Alberta system.

The purpose of the current phase is actually to set the stage for the final implementation. For example, they are going to develop options for the conversion of data from the existing system to the new system, make the determination of what aspects of the Alberta system need to be modified to reflect Manitoba practice and what Manitoba practices should be changed in order to conform to the, to the Alberta system.

So one of their deliverables will be a final project plan in October of 2009 that will set out exactly what needs to be done to get us to the completion, and it will include a schedule with, with you know an end date or a projected end date. We believe—so it depends somewhat on some of the choices and decisions that get made over the course of the next number of months. We hope for 2010,

but, honestly, in my experience with information systems, it's, it's prudent to plan for 2011.

And, also, as I say, there will probably be a need for some legislative changes again as, as some of our practices have to be modified, and, as you know, there's—you have to factor in some time for that.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Any other questions? Seeing none, I'm going to thank the minister and the deputy for appearing before—

Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): I'd ju—just liked to make a comment, if I could, and I'd like to thank Mr. Schnoor for being here this evening.

As the deputy minister indicated at the beginning of his opening statements, the 2005 report, the recommendations that were identified in there have been complied with, for the most part, it's, it's, it's an old report. We do have a newer report, the 2009 report. Unfortunately, we can't deal with that particular report at this committee meeting. We hope to be able to deal with it in a, a not-too-distant future.

* (19:20)

But I, I want to apologize on behalf of the committee, but I'm sorry we had to take you away from such a wonderful sunny evening, and I do thank you for not bringing any staff in here as well, Mr. Schnoor. So thank you very much for being here.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Borotsik. Thank you, Mr. Minister, and Mr. Schnoor. We will now move on to the Family Services and Housing. Thank you so much. And I would ask that the deputy minister, minister and staff come forward.

Thank you much. Before we get started, I would invite the minister to introduce his staff and—deputy minister and staff, please.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Martin Billinkoff, the Deputy Minister of Family Services and Housing.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Welcome to the committee.

Now I'm going to ask the Auditor General if she would like to make an opening statement.

Ms. Bellringer: I'll just make a very brief summary of the reports that relate to the Department of Family Services and Housing from the '05 report.

The first is the Child, Family and Community Development branch agency accountability and that report was originally issued in the summer of 1999. The, the report focussed, in effect, on the relationship between the department and various agencies, and the recommendations that I would suggest the committee may want to focus on would be the negotiation of service purchase agreements, and that—at the time of the '05 report, they had not all been put into place.

The—another recommendation that is—would take—it's a rather complex recommendation in terms of analyzing the funding models, and we had recommended that the agency expenditures be compared to the funding model on a, on a fairly regular basis. We also had looked at the analysis of—that was taking place within the department of the various documentation submissions that were provided to them by the agencies and made some recommendations around that analysis. And also sometimes the department is having difficulty obtaining information from agencies and we had made some suggestions as to—we didn't actually get very specific about it, but rather suggested that there be some steps taken to, to think about how to get that information when it wasn't being provided or wasn't being provided on a timely basis. And the final one in terms of the kind of information being provided to the Assembly.

The second report's on the child day care program and that was, it was on financial subsidies. The original audit was issued in the autumn of 1997 and in that audit we concluded that the subsidy eligibility and amounts were assessed in accordance with the act and the regulation. However, we had also concluded that subsidy applications were not processed in a timely manner. We also noted that subsidy payments were properly calculated and approved and made on a timely basis. We had recommended, however, that the child day care branch strengthen the processes for ensuring the claims were appropriately supported. We had another recommendation that, that the child day care program strengthen processes for measuring performance of the financial subsidies component and a further recommendation around information being provided to the Legislature.

The third report's on the Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centres, and that was a report issued in March of 2001. It was a rather—it contained a long list of recommendations, 41 recommendations in total, and at the time of the '05 follow-up report, 32

of those recommendations had been resolved. One of the major recommendations was that, that the Lions board develop an overall strategic plan for their organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Billinkoff, would you like to make an opening statement, please?

Mr. Martin Billinkoff (Deputy Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, thank you very much.

My staff—I tried to keep them away, but they couldn't stay away because they were so interested in this process. So I do thank them all for being here, and I'll just kindly mention their names 'cause they are here. It's Joy Cramer, Darryl Jones, Sheila Lebrecht, Denise Koss, Carolyn Loepky, Ben Van Haute, Willis Spears [*phonetic*] and Doug Ritchot.

And, you know, if there's questions that I'm not able to answer and they have information, I'm hoping that can help inform this process.

Mr. Chairperson: May I interrupt you, Mr. Billinkoff?

Mr. Billinkoff: Sure.

Mr. Chairperson: I'm sorry. If you have staff that you want to bring forward on a particular section, please feel free to have them come and join you at the table.

Mr. Billinkoff: Just by way of introduction, just to indicate, I'm pleased to be here, and I do appreciate the Auditor General's assistance. We've worked pretty closely with the Auditor General over the last number of years in strengthening our controllership functions. We've had lots of audits and reviews done in our department. We're not always happy when you have to have an audit or a review done, but I think, overall—and balance—they've really helped the department, and we continue to work towards doing a better job largely because of that.

As the Auditor General mentioned, there's three audits that are listed here from the 2005 report. Two of them, my understanding is these were our value-for-money audits, types of audits that were done back, you know, around, around 1999-2000 to sort of review areas that were—of activity—focussing on child-care subsidy and on agency accountability functions within the Child Protection branch. And the third one was related to the Lions Club, and that was an audit that was done, I believe, at the request

of the government at the time because of concerns about the Lions Club operations in the housing field. So it was a special investigation type of audit.

And, I think, at the present time, I'm not sure whether, whether this committee is able to deal with it. At the present time, though, I think we've completed implementation of the recommendations on the child-care audit and have one remaining recommendation that we—on the Lions Club audit that we expect to be dealt with within the next month or so. And a number of the recommendations related to agency accountability have not yet been resolved or signed off by the Auditor General. We've made considerable progress on all of them, and we are hopeful that this summer, when we do our review with the Auditor General, she will sign off on all of them.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much. The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): In referring to the child day care subsidies, I wonder if you could tell us what the main findings were of the child-care audit.

Mr. Billinkoff: I think, overall, the Auditor at the time was satisfied with the processes. I think the, the main concern at that time was, was lengthy delays in processing subsidy applications and, in those days, it was being done with some largely manually and with some outdated systems. About five years ago, we put in place a new information system called Child Care Online, and that system has largely eliminated problems and delays with processing of subsidy applications. So I think that's been a major step forward.

The other findings, I think, were more technical and were more around how we should, for example, document some of the procedures that we were using for handling investigations and guidelines for how we would do that and, as well, recommendations that we implement a sampling process for subsidy applications, which we have done.

So those are some of the main observations, but I would think—I think the main concern at that time coming out of the audit was the delays.

* (19:30)

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Any other questions?

Mr. Martindale: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. My questions are about the Agency Accountability Unit.

Could the deputy minister tell us what the role is of the Agency Accountability Unit, please?

Mr. Billinkoff: Yes. We established the—try and get my notes here so I can get this right—unit was established in September 2004, and initially we had six full-time equivalent positions allocated for it. A couple years later we doubled that to 12. The primary responsibility here is, of the unit, is to manage our service purchase agreements to ensure that we have service purchase agreements in place to set out procedures for financial reporting and ensuring that financial reports are received and reviewed and analyzed.

We also, the unit also does special investigations where, where there's concerns about agencies and organizations. They do risk assessment, and they establish risk assessment guidelines for reviews. And one of the things we've introduced more recently is training, trying to be more proactive in working with the agencies we fund so that they don't get into difficulty by offering training in board governance so the boards understand what their responsibilities are, and we do orientations on service purchase agreements for all new, new organizations that sign SPAs—that's what we call them—so that they understand what they mean and, and a variety of other training initiatives to try and ensure that the boards understand their responsibilities.

A lot of the organizations we fund are, are relatively small boards, volunteers from all over the province, not necessarily sophisticated in the sense of sitting on a lot of large boards, so we, we need to be proactive in working with them so they understand what their role is as a board member.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Chairperson, when was the agency created?

Mr. Billinkoff: 2004.

Mr. Martindale: Do you feel that the comptrollership within the department improved as a result of the establishment and work of the unit?

Mr. Billinkoff: Well, I think it has significantly. I think we—in particular, we, we now have service purchase agreements in place with virtually all of the funded agencies that we work with. The last remaining one which is outstanding was recently signed, but we have sort of gone from having less than half of our organizations under service purchase agreements to having virtually all of them now under

service purchase agreements. The only ones that aren't really are some new agencies that we've just started working with.

So I think that's one of—but I think more generally the—we've implemented a more rigorous practice around receiving reports, reviewing reports, working with agencies to identify variances from their plans, try to head off problems that they encounter.

We still, given the large number of agencies we fund—there's over a thousand that we fund—we still occasionally run into trouble with, with them or they run into trouble. But I think generally we're doing a much better job of ensuring accountability for, certainly for the financial functions and, and agencies seem to be doing, doing much better at—in terms of managing their own resources.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Billinkoff.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. One question, Mr. Billinkoff, one—again welcome, nice to have you here. It's not a terrible process, I can assure you. Perhaps, well, the next time we'll do—deal with a more timely report than the 2005, and I would ask that your staff be here for that one as well.

However, one question, the agencies, they're asked, obviously, to provide substantial information, whether it be financials or whether it be their own plans. If agencies aren't forthcoming with that information, what kind of remedies does the department have to I won't say force, but to have them comply with the request of the department?

Floor Comment: Well, we do—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Billinkoff.

Mr. Billinkoff: Oh, I'm sorry. Well, we do track our reports fairly carefully. We have a process where we keep track of what reports are due and when they're late. The usual process is, is that we first try to obtain the infor—we meet with the agency, with the staff of the agency to determine why it's late, and they often are late, quite frankly, because many of them are sma—small boards. Some of them have difficulty getting auditors, for example, to do the audited statements that are required. So it's not unusual for them to be late, and often there's reasons for it, and there is provision to extend time lines where there's good reason. When we're concerned, particularly concerned, about delays and getting information, we'll write to the board and bring it to the attention of

the board, or, if we need to, we'll meet with the board.

Beyond that, we, we also try to work proactively with them. One of the difficulties is that we have, I think, 201, I believe it is, service purchase agreements right now. I think almost all of them are with non-profit organizations that are almost entirely funded by the Province and that work with vulnerable people, so it's hard to impose financial penalties, because those would impact on service. So we're not in a position to say, well, we're not going to give you your money unless you bring your, your reports forward on a more timely basis, 'cause that will disadvantage the clients and result in service problems, and they don't typically have any other source of money.

So we try to work proactively with them. We do board development work with them. Those that are having difficulty complying, we meet with them and offer training and offer, in some cases, to actually sit down with them and work through whatever difficulties they're having. For example, some agencies have difficulty getting anybody who will audit their books locally, and so we help them find auditors, and work with the auditors to get their audited financial statements done. So that's the usual approach.

At the end of the day, we have the ability to, basically, to withdraw funding or to withhold funding—

Floor Comment: That's a last resort

Mr. Billinkoff: But that's a very last resort.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, just, once again, I would like to, to thank the deputy minister for being here. Again, the, the report is not necessarily timely, and I do know that, as the Auditor has indicated, the majority, if not all, of the recommendations have certainly been, been, been followed, and I appreciate that, and, hopefully, we can deal with it in a more timely report in the not-too-distant future, Mr. Billinkoff. So thank you very much.

Mr. Billinkoff: Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Seeing no other questions before us at this time, shall the Auditor's report—Follow-Up on Recommendations—A Review, dated—I'm sorry, Mr. Borotsik.

Mr. Borotsik: Just a comment, Mr. Chair, if I could please, and before you get to the final request. I, I, I just would like to say that I, I personally think that

PAC is working very, very well. I hadn't experienced PAC previously to my being here in 19—in 2007, certainly not in 1997, 2007, and I believe that there is a, a trust and a faith that we've developed within the PAC system.

I am disappointed, I have to admit, in not having the ability of the committee to have some flexibility into its agendas because, quite frankly, I have the 2009 follow-up report that I would love to have been able to debate and discuss and certainly question some of the—some of the deputies. That wasn't available to us, and, as I said, I'm disappointed in that.

I would hope that this committee could, at some future date, receive some more autonomy for its own development of its own agendas going forward, and, as I said, with the trust and with the faith that we've developed, I would certainly look at, Mr. Chairman, a passing this 2005 report to get on with some issues that are certainly more timely. So thank you for those comments—for allowing me to make those comments.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, thank you.

Ms. Howard: Just, I, I also—I agree with Mr. Borotsik. I think that the Public Accounts Committee has been functioning quite well, and in a quite different way than has been its history, and we have been passing reports, which has also been a new feature of these meetings, and I think, as we do that, we will deal with the backlog of reports, which is what we are trying to deal with. And, once that's dealt with, I think we will always see timely reports at committee because that's the, the agendas of the committee will just become normalized and part of the regular kind of cycle of the Legislature.

So I appreciate it's frustrating to have to deal with old reports, but I think we're making good progress, and the, the result of dealing with these reports will be more timely reports more frequently. And I know that's what we're all working towards.

* (19:40)

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Just before I call for the final recommendation or report, I just want to say thank you to the committee for the work that you've done. To this point in time, we have moved ahead and we will continue to work towards more flexibility and more autonomy, and I think, as time goes on, we certainly hope to achieve that, and I think it would help not only staff and departments but also help the Auditor General immensely and help this committee.

Just before we leave, I also want to ask—we had changed the seating plan for this evening, and I want to ask whether there are any reactions to the seating plan, or would you like to report back to Ms. Jennifer—or Ms. Howard and myself at a later time and then we can consider it in the steering committee?

Mr. Martindale: I would recommend that the Chair and the Vice-Chair should certainly feel free to discuss how it works, but I think I'd like to see the committee discuss it in our next 6 o'clock meeting before our next regularly scheduled meeting.

Mr. Borotsik: I'd just like to say I think it worked very well. It gave the deputy minister and the minister and the staff an opportunity to vacate the room very quickly without having to interrupt the rest of us at this time. So I think it worked well, and

I'm sure, if you asked them, they would agree as well so, but, Mr. Martindale certainly has a comment, a valid comment. We can discuss it at the next session.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Shall the Auditor's report—shall the Auditor General's Report—Follow-Up of Report Recommendations—A Review, dated July 2005 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: Pass. The report is accordingly passed.

The hour being 7:41, what is the—

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: The committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 7:41 p.m.

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