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(Hansard)**

P-15

**Standing Committee on
Public Accounts**

Organization

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 30 October 2019

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

Organisation

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mercredi 30 octobre 2019

Chair: Catherine Fife
Clerk: Christopher Tyrell

Présidente : Catherine Fife
Greffier : Christopher Tyrell

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTSCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
COMPTES PUBLICS

Wednesday 30 October 2019

Mercredi 30 octobre 2019

The committee met at 0903 in room 151.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for being here, and welcome back. We have some new committee members. We have an exciting in camera report that we're going to get a briefing on after we go through some housekeeping, if you will. I'm going to ask the Clerk to review what needs to happen, because we've had some committee membership changes and we need to elect a Vice-Chair.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): Yes, there have been some changes to the membership of the committee. As such, we have a vacancy in the Vice-Chair role.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 28, 2019, a change to the membership of our committee has occurred. This committee currently does not have a Vice-Chair. Therefore, it is my duty to entertain a motion for Vice-Chair. Are there any motions? Ms. Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I move that Madame Gélinas be appointed as Vice-Chair of the committee.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Is there any debate? Are the members ready—

Mr. Norman Miller: Debate? Sure. Madame Gélinas would be an excellent selection.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): That's a good part of the debate. That's how this committee works.

Are the members ready to vote? Yes. Shall the motion carry? All in favour? Thank you very much. The motion is carried.

APPOINTMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Also, this committee has a subcommittee that takes care of some housekeeping business as well. I believe we have a motion related to the subcommittee on committee business. Is there a motion?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I move that Madame Gélinas be appointed to the subcommittee on committee business.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Is there any debate on the motion? Seeing none, are the members ready to vote? All in favour, please raise your hand. Thank you very much. That motion is carried.

Yes, Mr. Cho?

Mr. Stan Cho: I move that Mr. Parsa replace Mr. Miller on the subcommittee on committee business.

Interjections.

Mr. Stan Cho: Excuse me. I haven't had my coffee this morning. Can I correct that?

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Please. Please restate it.

Mr. Stan Cho: I move that Mr. Miller replace Mr. Parsa on the subcommittee on committee business.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much. Any debate on that motion? Seeing none, are the members—oh, yes?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I think Mr. Miller will be very good on the subcommittee.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): So it's going to be like that?

Are the members ready to vote? There's further comment. Mr. Miller?

Mr. Norman Miller: The Clerk was just pointing out that I'm the current member, so we don't need to vote on this motion.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): This is true. Thank you very much.

Okay. So Mr. Miller and Ms. Gélinas are officially appointed to the subcommittee for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

First of all, I just want to say some opening comments. I want to welcome the new members to the best committee in the Legislature. We do very important work here.

I wondered if the auditor would like to say a few words about the work that this committee does?

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk: Yes. Congratulations to the members on the committee. I as well think it's the best committee in the Legislature. Obviously, I have a vested interest because this is the committee that hears our reports and, in itself, writes reports for the public on improvements that can be made in the administration of programs in the provincial government and the broader public sector. I look forward to working with everyone and, yes, I think you make positive change as a very good committee of the Legislature.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much, Auditor. Would research like to comment on your role here in the committee?

Ms. Erica Simmons: Yes, sure. Hello, everybody. I just wanted to talk briefly about the researcher's role on the committee, because we're fairly involved with the

work of the committee. I'll just give you a brief overview of our role on this public accounts committee, which we also sometimes call PAC.

I'm a Research Officer with the legislative research service, which is part of the larger legislative library and research service. But we are not librarians; the researchers have advanced degrees and backgrounds in public policy, law, economics, history, political science and other fields. We do non-partisan, confidential research for individual members and for legislative committees. Currently, there are three ROs—research officers—assigned to this committee: me, and my colleagues over there, Laura Anthony and Dmitry Granovsky. Each of us will do some of the reports for the committee, and each of us also works with other standing committees and the occasional select committee, as well as doing research for individual members from all parties when it's requested.

Our role in this particular committee is as follows: Before the committee's hearings on an audit, we will draft a background memo on the audit report, which is part of a package of background material to help you prepare for the hearings. The package, which you will receive from the Clerk, includes a backgrounder from the research officer, a copy of the audit report, a status update from the ministry or agency audited—which usually looks like this—where they explain what they've done in response to each of the auditor's recommendations, and then we may include other relevant material that we think might be helpful. But we try to keep the packages as brief as possible.

The backgrounder itself is a synopsis of the auditor's report, covering any applicable legislation, funding, the objectives of the audit and the main points of the audit, the auditor's recommendations. And then we also provide possible questions for you to ask during the hearings. You don't have to ask these questions. It's just to give you a jumping-off point.

The hearings are held in the afternoon. In the morning, as now, there's usually an in camera session for the auditor's briefing on the audit, where you can ask her any questions. Occasionally, not always, the researcher will also do a briefing, providing any relevant contextual material.

After the hearings conclude in the afternoon, there is about 10 minutes for the members to give the researcher instructions for writing the committee report on the hearing. So that's your time to tell the researcher what points or recommendations you want to make or what issues are of most concern to reflect in the report. And because this committee aims for consensus reports, the researcher is always trying to capture the consensus position of the committee.

With those instructions, the researcher goes off and drafts a report, trying their best to reflect the issues raised in the hearing and the committee's views and recommendations. We then will send the first draft of this report to the Auditor General's office, where they will review the draft to ensure that it accurately reflects the audit's findings. Then the Clerk schedules closed-session meetings

for report-writing, which gives the committee a chance to review the draft as many times as they need to and to request changes.

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Finally, I want to emphasize that although the researcher writes your draft, this is your report. It's supposed to reflect your ideas and views. It's not our report.

That's it.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much, Erica.

Clerk? Mr. Tyrell?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): In short, as Clerk of the Committee, I'm responsible for all of the administrative and procedural aspects of the committee. My role includes providing confidential, procedural advice to the Chair and to all members of the committee. I also handle administrative aspects, like the sending of notices and agendas, the recording of committee minutes, organizing hearings with ministry officials, handling and filing of committee exhibits etc.

I don't want to take up too much time and go through the mandate at length. I just want to say that I am happy to meet with any of you, if you'd like. I can give you a more in-depth briefing on the committee. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have. I know the Auditor General's office would likely also extend a similar courtesy, as they're always very helpful.

That's all for me.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Okay, thank you very much.

The auditor just wants to make another comment about their role.

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk: Just in terms of our role, all our reports that are written are tabled in the Legislative Assembly. When they're tabled, they're deemed as part of the committee's work, I guess, in terms of looking at our reports, determining whether or not you want to bring people in, hold hearings, write your own reports, make your own recommendations. Those reports are referred from the Legislature to this committee.

In the office, we look at this committee as a very important group of people who look at our work, look at our recommendations, and add support and credibility to those recommendations too. Our reports are written for you, as the members, and it's your constituents that we hope benefit from the recommendations in those reports and from your additional recommendations on those subjects.

Our value-for-money reports: We have about 15 or 16 a year that are referred to the committee. There are also chapters in our report dealing with the audit of the public accounts. We do special requests: The briefing today that you will receive is on Tarion, which was a special request from this committee for us to do. I think the request came to us last year.

My team and I look forward to working with you. You'll see presence in these meetings from staff in my office. They can supplement information in the report and

give you more details. Again, we do all look forward to working with you.

There is a document in front of you that's a briefing on our office.

I do extend to you—if anybody is interested in meeting, in coming to our office and meeting, or even for us to meet with you here in the Legislature, we can fill you in more on the work of our office. It's something we're very proud of, and we look forward to doing that.

Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Questions? Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norman Miller: Some day, when we don't have anything scheduled, it might be good to have the committee tour the office. I would say just to leave it for when we're not able to get—as is the nature of this committee, you're asking people to show up, and sometimes we end up with times where no one shows up.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Okay, that's a really good suggestion.

I would advise you to have a look at the package that the auditor's office outlined for us. As you know, the AG is an adviser to this committee.

The Clerk is going to be handing out the report because—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Madame Gélinas?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's just on what the auditor presented. The panel of senior advisers—I'm sort of curious as to where they come in. Am I allowed to ask that?

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Sure.

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk: A few years ago, we thought it was important that we have a lot of perspectives and eyes on the issues that we raise, to make sure that we're balanced, objective. There are things that other people might see from our work that we might not see, if we're right into the detail. So we formed a panel of senior advisers, and it's comprised of people who have expertise in various areas.

We have the former director, the retired director, of the Public Sector Accounting Board, who works with us on accounting issues; he's a member. We have, obviously, a lawyer—everybody has a lawyer—as a member. We have a professor from a university. We have a correspondent from the CBC. We have a previous head of an agency of the government. We have a think tank member. We have former Auditors General on the committee, and we have also now the former environmental commissioner of Canada on our committee. Again, we vet things that we are doing in our office, issues that we're seeing when we audit, drafts of some of our issues, and they provide us additional perspective on our reports before we finalize them.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Yes, Ms. Ghamari?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you. I wanted to see if we could follow up from that conversation we had at the conference in the summer. Remember we had that big group discussion—

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): The standing committee?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Yes. I think that was really productive because it gave us, as MPPs, an opportunity to learn more about the procedures and it gave the Auditor General and her team an opportunity to talk about what they do. I don't know if it would be—

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): So we will schedule that for a future meeting and we will take that under advisement.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Yes, and even talk about process and all that, because I think that was really helpful.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Okay, good. And that will be good. We have a new member on the NDP side and I think it's good for orientation for new members. Thank you.

This meeting will now move into closed session. If there are members of the public in the audience or staff, this room is specifically just for AG staff and for members.

The committee continued in closed session at 0916.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

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Mr. Stephen Crawford (Oakville PC)

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Ms. Goldie Ghamari (Carleton PC)

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Mr. Sheref Sabawy (Mississauga–Erin Mills PC)

Ms. Sandy Shaw (Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest–Ancaster–Dundas ND)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr. Tom Rakocevic (Humber River–Black Creek ND)

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk, Auditor General

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Christopher Tyrell

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Laura Anthony, research officer,
Research Services

Ms. Erica Simmons, research officer,
Research Services