

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Monday, June 16, 2025

Chair: John Williamson

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• (1105)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Natalie Jeanneault): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(3)(a), as the clerk of the committee, I will now preside over the election of the chair.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, entertain points of order or participate in debate.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

Go ahead, Ms. Kusie.

[Translation]

Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Madam Clerk.

I would like to welcome the new committee members.

[English]

I would like to nominate Mr. John Williamson, please.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

Seeing none, it has been moved by Ms. Kusie that Mr. Williamson be elected as chair of the committee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Williamson duly elected chair of the committee.

I invite Mr. Williamson to take the chair.

The Chair (John Williamson (Saint John—St. Croix, CPC)): Thank you.

It's nice to see everyone.

Congratulations to everyone on their re-election or election to Parliament. This is one of the most important functions of our parliamentary system: the establishment of committees throughout Parliament, both on the House of Commons side as well as on the Senate side.

I want to thank all of you for your confidence in me to serve as chairman of the public accounts committee. It's something I enjoyed doing in the last Parliament, and I'm certainly pleased to pick it up again.

I see a number of new members on both sides of the aisle, and I think it's going to be an interesting committee going forward. My door is always open to discuss with you ideas or concerns that you might have about the committee.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. I know that Ms. Yip can attest to that. Reports from the Auditor General that have literally piled up due to the elections and events that have happened since last year, so we have no shortage of work. I can see that we have a good team of people on both sides who are ready to take it on.

• (1110)

[Translation]

I've been speaking French for a few months now. However, back home, we speak English. In fact, the name of my constituency is pronounced the English way. My constituency is where Champlain spent his first winter, even before arriving in Quebec City. Although New Brunswick is a bilingual province, my area is English-speaking. So please bear with me when I speak French. It's my second language.

[English]

Having said that, I'm pleased to conduct this business in either official language, and I look forward to working

[Translation]

with my colleagues on both sides.

[English]

As well, I want to thank the entire team here, from the clerk to the interpreters and everyone in between. They make this committee work. Because we work at Parliament's schedule, there can be sudden changes and last-minute changes, so in advance I thank everyone for always conducting their work professionally, making us look professional and conducting meetings in an orderly manner. Thank you again.

I'm sure that the clerk will learn some of my habits. Again, I try to operate a professional operation, as well, and to treat all members of Parliament from all sides with the respect they have earned and deserve.

As usual, there's that old story that Ronald Reagan used to tell when he was asked if he was the most powerful man in the world. He would say that, no, the most powerful person in the world was the person who put the agenda and the speaking notes in front of him every single day. On that note, I'll turn to the notes that the clerk has provided to me this morning so that we can proceed here as a properly functioning committee.

If the committee agrees, I would invite the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs. I'm seeing general agreement on this.

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Go ahead, Monsieur Lemire.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Madam Clerk.

I would like to nominate Jean Yip, the Liberal Party member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

[English]

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

Seeing none, it has been moved by Monsieur Lemire that Ms. Yip be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ms. Yip duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, everyone.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Yip, would you like to say a few words just off the top? There was no chance for you to decline the nomination, just like there wasn't for me, but I'm glad you accepted it one way or the other.

I don't know if you have any words you'd like to say. It's not obligatory.

Jean Yip: I'm happy to be back and to be with some very familiar faces. I want to welcome some new faces on our side, your side and over there.

You'll find this to be a very interesting committee. I'm certain you will learn a lot and I hope we can all work together.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll turn things back over to the clerk.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the election of the second vice-chair.

Mr. Housefather, you have the floor.

Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Clerk.

I would like to nominate Sébastien Lemire for the position of second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

Apparently not.

It has been moved by Mr. Housefather that Mr. Lemire be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

• (1115

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Lemire duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Congratulations, Mr. Lemire.

Would you like to say a few words to the committee?

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to tell Gérard Deltell that I'll take great care to learn the indigenous name of his constituency.

I'm a member of the second opposition. I wouldn't go so far as to say that we miss the NDP. However, its absence on the committee is noticeable.

Mr. Chair, you said that the most powerful person wasn't necessarily the chair, but the person who prepares the chair's notes. I thought that you would say that the most powerful people are the members who sit on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, because they can hold certain people to account. Ensuring transparency is a key value in a democracy. It's a particularly fine challenge for me. That said, I feel that I'm keeping the seat warm for my former colleague from Terrebonne, Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné, who has filed a legal challenge to the election result. In the meantime, I'm here and I'm honoured to fulfill my duty.

I want to thank all the members for their trust in me.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

You're absolutely right. Committee members decide on all matters relating to our committee.

I would like to welcome everyone to the first meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. I think everyone here is in person; nobody is on Zoom. Members do have that option to join remotely, except for the chairs of all House of Commons parliamentary committees.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table. This is with respect to the translation and the audio system. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

This is a rather important matter. The interpreters do yeoman's work ensuring that debates are free-flowing here in both official languages. That said, if we are not careful, we can do harm to the interpreters if there is audio feedback. If you don't need the interpretation or the earpiece, just put it aside. If you do use it—you are certainly entitled to, and we encourage you to, just for clarity—please be sure that the earpiece is well away from the microphone when you are speaking. This is something I will remind members of frequently, usually at each meeting before we begin.

I have some general comments.

I would like to remind participants of the following points: Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking, and please address all comments through the chair.

I am just going to check with the clerk about next steps, because I think there are a couple of routine motions that we need to pass in order to get the committee business rolling in the days, weeks and months ahead.

We have a number of routine motions. I would ask members, if they would like to speak to any of them, to flag me or the clerk. That's true whether you are here in person or online. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order.

I suggest the next order of business is that the committee proceed with the adoption of its routine motions, of which there are many. You were sent them in the last couple of days by the clerk. These can be moved individually or they can be moved as a group, but I will turn it over to members to decide how we proceed.

I recognize Mrs. Kusie.

• (1120)

Stephanie Kusie: Chair, I would suggest we go one by one. I think that it can be a quick voice vote on each one. I don't think a recorded vote is necessary as we move through each of them. This is just so we are all aware of them and we're not doing a sweeping motion. You could just read them into the record and we could agree on a voice vote, if my colleagues are okay with that.

[Translation]

I think that it's still worthwhile to review the motions.

[English]

The Chair: Is that agreed?

All right.

Just as a warning, the bells will go in 10 to 15 minutes. We have a couple of options. We could, sometimes with unanimous consent, continue the meeting until we're a little closer to the actual vote, or we can revisit this. If we want to package them all to get them done, then we don't have to come back later. I will look to the members for that. I will attempt to read quickly as well.

Just one second.

Mrs. Kusie, I will need a mover for each one. It can be you or a member of the official opposition or a government member.

[Translation]

It could even be our friend from the Bloc Québécois.

Mrs. Kusie, you have the floor.

[English]

Stephanie Kusie: I certainly do not want to make this any more laborious than is necessary. I'm seeing that there are probably a dozen routine motions, if I had to estimate, upon reviewing this, so perhaps I would suggest this: Would it be possible for me to make a motion for you to read them into the record and have a voice vote at the conclusion of reading them into the record?

Again, I would just provide this option so that participants are aware of the routine motions.

The Chair: I'm looking around. Is that fine? It is. All right.

I will read fast. I might even have the clerk pick up at some point.

I will begin with analyst services:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

[Translation]

This motion concerns the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members, namely the Chair and one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

[English]

I'll go back to analyst services for a voice vote on the following:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

In our case, it will be two analysts.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Gentlemen, would you like to join us, please?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. I will do a more extensive introduction later. In the interest of time, I will to try to get through this before before the bells begin.

I have permission to read the rest into the record. Then we can vote on them.

This motion is with regard to meeting without a quorum:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government party.

[Translation]

This motion concerns travel:

That, when travelling outside the Parliamentary Precinct: (a) the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of whether quorum is present, (b) no substantive motion may be moved during such meetings.

• (1125)

[English]

The next motion is with regard to time for opening remarks and questions of witnesses. It reads:

That witnesses be given five (5) minutes for their opening statements; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six (6) minutes for the first questioner of each party, as follows: in the first round, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois; that for the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes; Conservative Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes.

[Translation]

This motion concerns document distribution:

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee and only when the documents are in both official languages; and that all documents submitted to the committee in both official languages that do not come from a federal department, members' offices, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau, be sent for linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members, and that the witnesses be advised accordingly.

[English]

The next motion is with regard to working meals:

That the clerk of the committee, at the discretion of the Chair, be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

The next one deals with travel accommodations and living expenses of witnesses:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding two representatives per organization; and that in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

The next motion deals with access to in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff member at in camera meetings and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

That, during in camera meetings, committee members may be informed by the committee Chair of the MPs who have been designated as substitutes for permanent members, in order to know which MPs are authorized to speak and vote during these committee meetings; that only those who have been recognized and identified as such be authorized to speak, in keeping with the usual agreed rules of order and decorum.

[Translation]

I'll now read the motion on the transcripts of in camera meetings.

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be securely retained by the committee clerk for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff; and that the analysts assigned to the committee have access to the in camera transcripts.

[English]

We go to notices of motions:

That a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, be required for any substantive motion to be moved in committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that:

- (a) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday, and no later than 2.30 p.m. on Friday;
- (b) the motion be distributed to members and the offices of the whips of each recognized party in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour;
- (c) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day.

We go to orders of reference from the House respecting bills:

That in relation to orders of reference from the House respecting bills,

- (a) The clerk of the committee shall, upon the committee receiving such an order of reference, write to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to invite those members to file with the clerk of the committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the bill that is the subject of the said Order that they would suggest that the committee consider;
- (b) Suggested amendments filed pursuant to paragraph (a) at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given bill; and
- (c) During the clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, the Chair shall allow a member who filed suggested amendments pursuant to paragraph (a) an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

• (1130)

[Translation]

I'll now read the motion on the technical tests for witnesses.

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the committee that the House Administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advise the committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

[English]

We go to whips' access to digital binders:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to grant access to the committee's digital binder to the offices of the whips of each recognized party.

We go to maintenance of order and decorum:

That, during meetings, the Chair, if necessary, uses his prerogative to suspend the meeting to maintain the order and decorum necessary to ensure the application of the House of Commons' policies on workplace health and safety.

I believe that covers everything, Madam Clerk.

Oh, apparently there's more. Hold on a second.

Is there any debate on this?

The clerk has just informed me that there were some other routine motions passed in the previous Parliament that are specific to public accounts. For example, one of the motions I just read deals with legislation, which this committee has not concerned itself with, or at least not in my memory.

That said, there are other motions that are relevant to this committee, so before I deal with this, why don't we deal with the general ones? Then I can come back to these. Unfortunately, these were not distributed to you previously. I'm happy to read them into the record. We could pick up the debate at another time, but for now, let's just deal with the ones that I have read into the record.

Is there any concern or debate? Should I call the vote to pass the routine motions as you received them by email? Because I know those are correct and accurate, I won't say "read in". Is there any dissent?

[Translation]

Would you like to say something, Mr. Lemire?

Sébastien Lemire: I have a question.

At this point, are the routine motions considered adopted? I understand that we'll be receiving additional motions by email shortly, so that we can see the wording before we discuss them.

The Acting Chair (John Williamson): I think so. I'll just read them after we finish dealing with these routine motions. For now, we're only talking about the motions that I just read.

[English]

Ms. Kusie is next.

[Translation]

Stephanie Kusie: If it makes the member feel more comfortable, we can hold another vote for the additional motions.

[English]

The Chair: For the routine motions that I just read into the record, and only those ones, do I have agreement that they will be adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I see that the room is indicating yes on both sides.

(Motions agreed to)

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for a minute. I want to review these to make sure there are no surprises.

I see that the bells are going off. Could I just have UC? I won't keep you here for more than 10 minutes. Could I have unanimous consent to bring this meeting back to order in about two minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Yes? Okay. Thank you.

Just give me two minutes, everyone.

We are suspended.

• (1	(Pause)
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• (1135)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

The next series of motions have been emailed to you. I'm not going to pick them up today. In the interest of transparency and to give every member an opportunity to review them, I'm going to leave them. We'll come back to them. I'm not going to read them into the record because in the copy I have, there's a date that needs to be switched. You'll be receiving them electronically. We'll probably pick them up at the next meeting. That's the first thing.

Linked to that are the documents you received in camera. That means they're secret, so these documents should remain confidential. Ms. Yip will be very familiar with them. These are the reports that we had begun reviewing or that need to be addressed, or at least considered, by this committee going forward. We'll deal with these at a later date, either in the committee or in the subcommittee, depending on how members would like to proceed.

Another issue is that over the first weekend in September, there is an annual conference of auditors general and public accounts committees taking place in Saskatchewan. All of the auditors general from across the country attend, as well as public accounts committees from the federal, provincial and territorial legislatures. It's a three-day conference. It's really a two-day conference, but people typically arrive on Sunday and begin to leave on Tuesday. There's representation from all parties. I think there are four or five slots, but I can get back to you and the clerk.

If this is something you would like to participate in, please discuss it among yourselves and with your whips. It's a good learning opportunity, because we hear from the auditors general about the issues they're dealing with. For example, in my home province of New Brunswick, the courts just ruled against the auditor's access to certain documents that the auditor's office was attempting to review. That's something that I'm sure will be discussed this year. The conference looks at best practices. Information on that will be sent to you in the next couple of days.

I'm just going to check with the clerk, and then I'll wrap things up very quickly.

This is my last point, and the clerk's timing is very good. We are scheduled to have meetings on Tuesday and Thursday. I was not planning on calling a meeting tomorrow, but I was planning on bringing in the auditor and the environment commissioner on Thursday, which is pro forma, to update this committee on the nine reports that were just tabled in Parliament.

This normally happens the day the reports are tabled, and then we begin to hear from the departments in question. My solution to this unique situation of reports being tabled before this committee was set up is to hear only from the OAG, which would include the auditor and the environment commissioner, on those reports. If there is agreement to do that, I require one motion to pass it. Can I proceed? I'll read this, and then we can take some feedback. Otherwise, I could schedule a meeting tomorrow to deal with this.

I'm at the committee's discretion. If you'd like to come back tomorrow to deal with this, without prejudicing anyone, I could read this into the record. Why don't I start with that? Do we have agreement for that?

We do. Okay.

• (1140)

[Translation]

The motions have been sent by email. I'll read them in both official languages if necessary.

[English]

I'll begin in English. This motion reads as follows:

That all organizations that have been subject to a performance audit or a special examination by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada provide a detailed action plan to address the audit recommendations which have been agreed to—including specific actions, timelines for their completion and responsible individuals—to the committee and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada within six months of the audit being tabled in the House of Commons;

That organizations that are invited to appear before the committee to discuss the findings of an audit should provide an action plan to the committee no later than 48 hours prior to the hearing;

That action plans and progress reports received by the committee be published on the committee's website.

That is the motion. It really is routine. It just stipulates that departments that are subject to reviews and audits by the Auditor General provide action plans and feedback.

I will look for comments. I will seek your agreement to pass this, but I want to proceed slowly here just in case the government members in particular have any concerns.

Go ahead, Mr. Housefather.

Anthony Housefather: I would just like to understand, Mr. Chair. Is this identical to a motion passed by this committee in the last Parliament and in previous Parliaments?

The Chair: It is. This was just handed to me by the clerk. It is identical. It is really just routine business. This is a requirement of the committee that departments report their action plans in response to the Auditor General's reports. Those action plans we review as a committee. It is entirely routine.

Anthony Housefather: That's perfect.

The Chair: Could I seek, then, agreement on this one motion?

This will signal to departments that the work of the 45th Parliament has begun and that we will begin to hold them accountable for their actions and, of course, subject to the Auditor General's reports as well.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I think that is almost it. I think I'm subject to my 10 minutes.

I have a few more comments to make, but I promised everyone that we'd get out of here quickly. I will gavel the meeting out now, and I will not call the meeting back after the votes. We'll see everyone here on Thursday.

One note is that we might start at 10 a.m. instead of 11 a.m. because the Auditor General has a personal conflict, and she has been remarkable in the past for accommodating our schedule. Therefore, it is my intention to bring us in at 10 o'clock on Thursday, which means that we'll be done by noon.

Thank you very much, everyone. I look forward to working with you all.

This meeting is adjourned.

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