

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Appointment and Composition of the Committee

Members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Committee) are appointed by a motion of the Legislature. The number of members from any given party reflects that party's representation in the Legislative Assembly. All members except the Chair are entitled to vote on motions, while the Chair may vote only to break a tie. The Committee is normally established for the duration of the Parliament, from the opening of its first session immediately following a general election to its dissolution.

Following the October 2011 election of a minority Liberal government, agreement was reached on the Committee's membership in February 2012. In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Assembly, the Committee was appointed on February 23, 2012, with the following members:

Norm Miller, Chair, Progressive Conservative
Toby Barrett, Vice-chair, Progressive Conservative
France G linas, New Democrat
Phil McNeely, Liberal
Reza Moridi, Liberal
Jerry Ouellette, Progressive Conservative
Liz Sandals, Liberal
Jagmeet Singh, New Democrat
David Zimmer, Liberal

On September 10, 2012, in accordance with the February 23 motion, the Committee was dissolved. At the time this report was prepared, a motion had not yet been passed appointing the committee members for the fall 2012 session. The Legislature was prorogued on October 15, 2012.

Role of the Committee

The Committee is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on reports from the Auditor General and on the Public Accounts, which are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Committee as they become available. The Committee examines, assesses and reports to the Legislative Assembly on a number of issues, including the economy and efficiency of government and broader-public-sector operations and the effectiveness of programs in achieving their objectives. The Committee typically holds a number of hearings throughout the year relating to matters raised in our Annual Report or our special reports and presents its observations and recommendations to the Legislative Assembly. Under sections 16 and 17 of the *Auditor General Act*, the Committee may also request that the Auditor General examine any matter in respect of the Public Accounts or undertake a special assignment on its behalf.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S ADVISORY ROLE WITH THE COMMITTEE

In accordance with section 16 of the *Auditor General Act*, the Auditor General and senior staff attend all committee meetings to assist the Committee with its reviews and hearings relating to our Annual Report, Ontario's Public Accounts and any special reports issued by our Office.

Committee Procedures and Operations

The Committee may meet weekly when the Legislative Assembly is sitting, and, with the approval of the House, at any other time of its choosing. All meetings are open to the public except for those dealing with the Committee's agenda or the preparation of its reports. All public committee proceedings are recorded in Hansard, the official verbatim report of government debates, speeches and other Legislative Assembly proceedings.

The Committee identifies matters of interest from our Annual Report or our special reports and conducts hearings on them. It typically focuses on reports from the value-for-money chapter of our Annual Report for review. For example, each of the three political parties normally selects three audits or other sections from our Annual Report for the Committee to review.

At each hearing, the Auditor General, along with the Committee's researcher, briefs the Committee on the applicable report section and the responses to our findings and recommendations from the ministry, Crown agency or organization in the broader public sector that was the subject of the audit. The Committee typically asks senior officials from the auditee(s) to appear at the hearings and respond to questions from committee members. Because our Annual Report deals with operational, administrative and financial rather than policy matters, ministers are rarely asked to attend. Once its hearings are

completed, the Committee provides its comments and recommendations to the Legislative Assembly.

The Clerk of the Committee also requests that those auditees that were not selected for hearings update the Committee on what actions they are taking to address the concerns raised and recommendations made in our reports.

MEETINGS HELD

The Committee met 20 times during the February 2012–September 2012 period. Almost all of these meetings were related to our Office's March 2012 special report, *Orange Air Ambulance and Related Services*, and included a number of sessions where witnesses were called and questioned. The remaining meetings were either administrative in nature or related to a motion filed by one of the committee members requesting that our Office examine certain Ontario Power Authority contracts. In its final meeting on September 5, 2012, the Committee passed a related motion requesting that our Office examine the contract between the Ontario Power Authority and Greenfield South Power Corporation/Eastern Power Limited regarding the cost to taxpayers of the cancelled Mississauga gas plant project. We plan to issue a Special Report on the results of this work in 2013.

REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee issues reports and letters on its work for tabling in the Legislative Assembly. These reports and letters summarize the information gathered by the Committee during its meetings and include the Committee's comments and recommendations. Once tabled, all committee reports and letters are publicly available through the Clerk of the Committee or online at www.ontla.on.ca.

Committee reports typically include recommendations and request that management of the Ministry, agency or broader-public-sector organization provide the Committee Clerk with responses within a stipulated time frame. Our Office reviews these

recommendations and responses, and we take them into consideration in any subsequent follow-up section or audits of that operational area.

Since its appointment in February 2012, the Committee focused almost exclusively on matters relating to our special report, *Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services*, and these hearings were still ongoing when the Committee was dissolved in September 2012. No committee reports had been issued as of that time, but during the period from February through September 2012, the Committee did table two items with the Legislature, both requesting a Speaker's Warrant for the appearance of Dr. Chris Mazza at the hearings on our Ornge special report.

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES

The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) consists of delegates from federal, provincial and territorial public accounts committees from across Canada. CCPAC holds a joint annual conference with the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The 33rd annual conference was hosted by Nunavut and was held in Iqaluit from August 19 to 21, 2012.