Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Report on 2008 Activities

February 2009
February, 2009

To the Honourable Ken Kowalski
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
of the Province of Alberta

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has the honour to submit this Report relating to its 2008 activities for consideration by the Legislative Assembly.

(original signed by)

Hugh MacDonald, MLA
Edmonton-Gold Bar
Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
MEMBERS OF THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

27th Legislature, First Session, 2008

Hugh MacDonald, MLA
Chair
Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)

Doug Griffiths, MLA
Deputy Chair
Battle River-Wainwright (PC)

Carl Benito, MLA
Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Mr. Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA
Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)

Harry Chase, MLA
Calgary-Varsity (AL)
Cal Dallas, MLA
Red Deer-South (PC)

Jonathan Denis, MLA
Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Wayne Drysdale, MLA
Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)

Kyle Fawcett, MLA
Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Broyce Jacobs, MLA
Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)

Jeff Johnson, MLA
Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Darshan Kang, MLA
Calgary-McCall (AL)

Brian Mason, MLA
Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
Dave Quest, MLA
Strathcona (PC)

Peter Sandhu, MLA
Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Tony Vandermeer, MLA
Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)

Teresa Woo-Paw, MLA
Calgary-Mackay (PC)
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I. INTRODUCTION

The mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to review the Public Accounts of the Province of Alberta and Ministry Annual Reports by asking questions with respect to expenditures in Government Departments, and to review the Auditor General's semi-annual and other reports.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts comprises a Chair who is a Member of the Official Opposition, a Deputy Chair who is a member of the Government Caucus, 12 Government Members, two Liberal Opposition Members, and one New Democrat Member.


The annual reports for the Ministries for the years ended March 31, 2007 and March 31, 2008 contain Ministers' accountability statements, the audited consolidated financial statements of the Ministries, and a comparison of actual performance results and the desired results set out in the Ministries' business plans.
II. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

In 2008 previous changes made to the scope and mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts were kept in place by temporary amendments to the Standing Orders. Pursuant to Government Motion 23, passed on November 27, 2008, the expanded scope of the Committee will become permanent. Including:

- The mandate of the Public Accounts Committee shall be expanded and include reviewing and reporting on the Public Accounts of Alberta, all reports of the Auditor General of Alberta and any other matter referred to it from time to time by the Legislature. Its mandate extends to all public entities funded by Government including agencies, boards, commissions and regional health authorities.

- The Committee may call and question Ministers, senior department officials or officials of agencies, boards and commissions of Government and such others as may be necessary for the full pursuit of its duties.

- The Committee shall set its own agenda and may sit whether or not the House is in session.

- Necessary resources will be provided for staffing to ensure adequate support for the Committee’s expanded mandate.

- All reports of the Auditor General shall stand permanently referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

- The Committee may report to the House, and the Government shall respond to a report of the Public Accounts Committee within 150 days of the date on which the Committee reports.

The practice of Deputy Ministers and department officials appearing before the Committee, without the Minister in attendance, has continued.
The Auditor General and his staff continued to attend and participate in all Committee meetings, and played an active role in Committee briefing sessions.


The Committee held out-of-session meetings in October with ATB Financial and with three school jurisdictions: Edmonton School District No. 7, Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1, and Livingstone Range School Division No. 68.

### III. SCHEDULE OF STANDING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in 2008 were held as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Date</th>
<th>Appearance/Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 23, 2008</td>
<td>Organizational Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30, 2008</td>
<td>Energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 7, 2008</td>
<td>Advanced Education and Technology</td>
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<td>May 14, 2008</td>
<td>Health and Wellness</td>
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<td>May 21, 2008</td>
<td>Solicitor General and Public Safety, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission</td>
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<td>May 28, 2008</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
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<td>June 4, 2008</td>
<td>Service Alberta</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 7, 2008</td>
<td>Edmonton Public Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 7, 2008</td>
<td>Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8, 2008</td>
<td>ATB Financial</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8, 2008</td>
<td>Livingstone Range School Division</td>
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<td>October 15, 2008</td>
<td>Auditor General</td>
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<td>October 22, 2008</td>
<td>Justice and Attorney General</td>
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<td>October 29, 2008</td>
<td>Finance and Enterprise</td>
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<td>November 5, 2008</td>
<td>Tourism, Parks and Recreation And Culture and Community Spirit</td>
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<td>November 19, 2008</td>
<td>Children and Youth Services</td>
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<td>November 26, 2008</td>
<td>Executive Council</td>
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<td>December 3, 2008</td>
<td>Sustainable Resource Development</td>
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The proceedings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts are open to the public. Gavel-to-gavel coverage of the audio of Committee meetings is streamed live on the Internet, and all meetings are recorded in *Alberta Hansard*. Copies of the transcripts may be found on the Committee’s website at: [www.assembly.ab.ca/committees/publicaccounts](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/committees/publicaccounts) or in the Legislature Library.
IV. CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

Joint Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA) and Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) Conference

This report is submitted on behalf of the following Members and staff of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta who attended the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) Conference in Whitehorse, Yukon from September 7 to 9, 2008.

From the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:
Hugh MacDonald, MLA, Chair
Doug Griffiths, MLA, Deputy Chair
Philip Massolin, Committee Research Coordinator
Corinne Dacyshyn, Committee Clerk

From the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices:
Len Mitzel, MLA, Chair
Robin Campbell, MLA, Committee Member

The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees Conference was attended by parliamentarians, researchers, Committee Clerks and other professionals from across Canada and the Canadian House of Commons. This conference is held at the same time as the Annual Conference of the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA), and the two groups shared a full-day business session.

Mr. Fred Dunn, FCA, Alberta Auditor General, and Mr. Doug Wylie, CMA, Assistant Auditor General from Alberta, attended as CCOLA delegates. Ms Lori Turdgeon, Communications Manager, attended as an observer.
The CCPAC Conference topics were:

**Topic:** Overview of the Findings from CCAF-World Bank-KPMG-PAC Survey  
**Presenters:** Geoff Dubrow, Director, Capacity Development, CCAF-FCVI  
Rick Stapenhurst, Senior Public Management Specialist, World Bank Institute  
**Discussants:** Carol Bellringer, Auditor General, Manitoba  
Harry Van Mulligen, Chair, Saskatchewan PAC  
Kerry Jacobs, Professor of Accounting, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

**Topic:** Good Practices in Issuing Recommendations and Following Up  
**Panellists:** Sheila Fraser, Auditor General of Canada  
Norm Sterling, Chair, Public Accounts Committee, Legislative Assembly of Ontario  
Vincent Auclair, Vice-Chair, Public Administration Committee, Quebec National Assembly

**Topic:** Presentation on Report by Newfoundland Supreme Court Justice Derek Green  
Stemming from the Auditor General of Newfoundland’s 2005 and 2006 Reports on Spending by certain Members of the Legislature and House Officials.

**Topic:** Presentation on Performance Reporting – including Alberta Public Performance Reporting – Report on User Consultation Groups  
Geoff Dubrow, Director, Capacity Development, CCAF-FCVI  
**Trends and Opportunities in Performance Reporting**  
John Doyle, Auditor General, British Columbia

**Business Session:** Report from Geoff Dubrow, Director, Capacity Development, CCAF-FCVI

**Business Session:** Report from Craig James, Executive Director, CCPAC
CCAFC’S Western Canada Symposium:
Improved Public Performance Reporting in Western Canada-Past, Present and Future

This report is submitted on behalf of the following Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta who attended the CCAF’s Western Canada Symposium in Vancouver, British Columbia from September 10 to 11, 2008.

From the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:
Hugh MacDonald, MLA, Chair
Doug Griffiths, MLA, Deputy Chair

Mr. Fred Dunn, FCA, Alberta Auditor General, and Mr. Doug Wylie, CMA, Assistant Auditor General from Alberta also attended.

Symposium sessions included:

Session: Showcasing Recent Western Canadian Initiatives in Performance Reporting
Moderator: Carol Bellringer, Auditor General, Manitoba

Session: Case Studies: International Experiences in Citizen Engagement and Innovative E-Performance Reporting
Moderator: Lee McCormack, Director of Research, CCAF-FCVI

Session: Keynote Speaker
Donald G. Lenihan, Senior Associate, Public Policy Forum

Session: Towards the Principles for a Performance Report of the Future
Facilitator: Geoff Dubrow, Director, Capacity Development, CCAF-FCVI
Overall Impressions

“It was a pleasure to represent the Legislative Assembly of Alberta at the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) and Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA) Annual Conference in Whitehorse, Yukon in September 2008. The sessions were all very interesting. Two sessions, however, stand out: the presentation by Newfoundland Supreme Court Justice Derek Green stemming from the Auditor General of Newfoundland’s report on legislative spending, and the report by Mr. John Doyle, Auditor General of British Columbia on trends and opportunities in performance reporting.”

“The dialogue with legislators from across Canada was informative. The work carried out by the Alberta Public Accounts Committee is different than the work of other provincial committees.”

“As Chair of the Alberta Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I look forward to hosting the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) and Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA) Annual Conference along with Mr. Fred Dunn, FCA, Auditor General of Alberta, in Edmonton in 2009.”

Hugh MacDonald, MLA
Edmonton-Gold Bar
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Overall Impressions

“The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees Conference was a very valuable experience. It is evident that Alberta, as a jurisdiction, has made tremendous headway over recent years in improving the effectiveness of public accounts, and actually stands well ahead of its counterparts across the country when it comes to the existence and use of tools, such as the Ministry Business Plans, Performance Measures, and the very valuable document, Measuring Up.”

“The CCAF conference was incredibly valuable. Presentations on improving performance measures, improving public reporting of performance measures, moving to dynamic reporting on performance over static year end reporting, were all valuable presentations that gave me a lot of new ideas and raised a host of new issues. I must point out that an exceptional presentation was made by Doug Lynkowski, Alberta's Controller, on what Alberta's document, Measuring Up, which is a valuable tool for the Public Accounts Committee and the public at large.”

“There was a lot of information to absorb at this conference and it was very forward thinking and visionary.”

“I understand this conference is in our home province next year and I encourage all public accounts committee members to attend the conference.”

Doug Griffiths, MLA
Battle River-Wainwright
Deputy Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts