



# Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Report on 2011 Activities

February 2012



**COMMITTEES**  
OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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February 2012

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 of submitting this report relating to its 2011 activities for consideration by the Legislative Assembly.

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

**MEMBERS OF THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**27th Legislature, Fourth Session, 2011**

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Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)

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Kyle Fawcett, MLA  
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Heather Forsyth, MLA<sup>†</sup>  
Calgary-Fish Creek (W)

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Peter Sandhu, MLA  
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Teresa Woo-Paw<sup>†</sup>  
Calgary-Mackay (PC)

David H. Xiao, MLA  
Edmonton-McClung (PC)

\*Deputy Chair to October 25, 2011 ( remained a Committee member subsequently)

\*\*Committee member and Deputy Chair from October 25, 2011

<sup>∞</sup>Committee member from February 23, 2011

<sup>‡</sup>Committee member to February 23, 2011

<sup>†</sup>Committee member from October 25, 2011

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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 the expenditures of 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, and a Deputy Chair, who is a member of the government caucus, and 15 additional members. The caucus representation of the 15 members is proportionate to the number of seats held by each party in the Assembly.

The public accounts of Alberta are prepared in accordance with the *Financial Administration Act* and the *Government Accountability Act*. The public accounts consist of the annual report of the Government of Alberta and the annual reports of each of its ministries.

The 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 annual reports of the Government of Alberta contain an accountability statement and the consolidated financial statements of the province. The *Measuring Up* report provides a comparison of the actual performance results and the desired results as set out in the government's business plan.

The annual reports for the ministries for the years ended March 31, 2010, and March 31, 2011, contain ministers' accountability statements, the audited consolidated financial statements of the ministries and a comparison of actual performance results and the performance targets set out in the ministries' business plans.

## **II. MANDATE AND SCOPE**

Pursuant to Government Motion 23, passed on November 27, 2008, an expanded scope and mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts became permanent, including the following:

- The mandate of the Public Accounts Committee includes 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 and commissions.
- 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.

### **III. ACTIVITIES**

In 2011, 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.

During the spring 2011 sitting of the Alberta Legislature, the Public Accounts Committee held ten meetings with ministries concerning the 2009-2010 public accounts and reports of the Auditor General of Alberta from October 2010 and April 2011.

The 2010-2011 annual report of the Government of Alberta and the ministries' annual reports were released in June 2011. The release of the semi-annual report of the Auditor General followed in November 2011.

During the fall 2011 sitting of the Alberta Legislature the Public Accounts Committee held three meetings on the 2010-2011 public accounts and one meeting respecting the April and November 2011 reports of the Auditor General of Alberta.

## IV. SCHEDULE OF STANDING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in 2011 were held as follows:

<b><u>Meeting Date</u></b>	<b><u>Appearance/Topic</u></b>
February 23, 2011	Solicitor General and Public Security
March 2, 2011	Justice and Attorney General
March 9, 2011	Culture and Community Spirit
March 16, 2011	Agriculture and Rural Development
March 23, 2011	Energy
April 13, 2011	Seniors and Community Supports
April 20, 2011	Aboriginal Relations
April 27, 2011	Advanced Education and Technology
May 11, 2011	Alberta Health and Wellness
May 18, 2011	Workers' Compensation Board
October 26, 2011	Human Services
November 23, 2011	Sustainable Resource Development
November 30, 2011	Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission
December 7, 2011	Office of the Auditor General

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 are available on the Committee's website at [www.assembly.ab.ca/committees/publicaccounts](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/committees/publicaccounts) or in the Legislature Library.

## **V. CCPAC/CCOLA CONFERENCE**

### **Joint conference of Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) and Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA)**

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 Halifax, Nova Scotia, from August 28 to 30, 2011.

#### **i. Attendance**

##### **From the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:**

Dave Rodney, MLA, Deputy Chair (Deputy Chair up to October 25, 2011)

Peter Sandhu, MLA, Committee Member

Philip Massolin, Committee Research Coordinator

Jody Rempel, Committee Clerk

##### **From the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices:**

Len Mitzel, MLA, Chair

The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conference was attended by parliamentarians, researchers, committee clerks and other professionals from jurisdictions across Canada, including the Canadian House of Commons, and also involved international guests and observers. This conference is held at the same time as the annual conference of the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA), and the two groups were involved in several joint business sessions.

Mr. Merwan Saher, CA, Auditor General, and Mr. Doug Wylie, CMA, Assistant Auditor General, attended as the CCOLA delegates from Alberta.

## **ii. Conference topics**

### **Joint Sessions:**

#### **Opening Remarks**

Facilitators: Hon. Gordie Gosse, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia  
Diana Whalen, CMA, MLA, Chair, Nova Scotia Standing Committee on Public Accounts  
Jacques Lapointe, CA, CIA, CGAP, Auditor General of Nova Scotia

#### **Improving PAC Effectiveness – The UK Perspective**

Guest Speaker: Rt. Hon. Margaret Hodge, MP  
Chair, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, United Kingdom

#### **Improving PAC Effectiveness – Changes to the Manitoba PAC**

*Significant changes in Manitoba's PAC have improved its effectiveness. What elements have contributed to this process? Are there lessons to be learned for other jurisdictions?*

Panelists: Len Derkach, Chairman, Public Accounts Committee, Legislative Assembly of Manitoba  
Carol Bellringer, Auditor General of Manitoba  
Rick Yarish, Deputy Clerk, Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

#### **Alternative Ways to Measure Government Effectiveness**

*Founded in 1997, GPI Atlantic is an independent, non-profit research and education organization committed to the development of the Genuine Progress Index (GPI) – a new measure of sustainability, well-being and quality of life.*

Guest Speaker: Ron Colman, Executive Director, GPI Atlantic

#### **Improving Effectiveness (continued): PAC - AG Collaboration**

*An interactive session using voting technology to elicit participant views on PAC - AG collaboration and effectiveness. Based on CCAF Attributes of an Effective PAC.*

Facilitators:

Geoff Dubrow, Principal Associate, CCAF-FCVI Inc.

Norm Sterling, Chair, Public Accounts Committee, Legislative Assembly of  
Ontario

## **Closing Remarks and Nunavut Invitation**

### **CCPAC Breakout Sessions:**

#### **Chairs/Vice Chairs: Speak your Mind Session**

#### **Clerks/Researchers Meeting**

#### **The Effective Public Accounts Committee** *(facilitated by CCAF)*

*An interactive voting session using electronic voting equipment to gauge perceptions about the effectiveness of public accounts committees in Canada. For committee members, clerks and researchers.*

#### **Effective Questioning in PAC Sessions** *(facilitated by CCAF)*

*An interactive session on the effective questioning of witnesses appearing before PAC. Video clips and simulations used to provoke discussion and generate strategies for effective questioning.*

### **CCOLA Breakout Sessions:**

#### **CCOLA Business meeting**

2010-2011 Committee Annual Activity Reports

2011-12 CCOLA Business Plan and Budget

CCOLA Administrative Business

CCOLA Secretariat Issues

#### **CCAF presentation and discussion**

Strategic Plan

Audit Watch, Performance Audit Curriculum

**Auditors General: Speak Your Mind Session**

**SIG Meeting**

### **iii. Overall Impressions**

Please find attached report from Mr. Dave Rodney, MLA Calgary-Lougheed, who was one of the attendees representing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

## Public Accounts 2011 Conference Report from Dave Rodney

November 30, 2011

Dear Mr. Speaker and Jody:

The Annual Conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committee was held in Halifax from August 28 – 30, 2011; and I was honoured to attend as deputy chair of the public accounts committee for the legislative assembly of Alberta.

“Improving PAC Effectiveness—the UK Perspective”, featured the Right Honourable MP Margaret Hodge, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, United Kingdom. It was interesting to learn that the equivalent of our committee is the most respected committee of the assembly, and that it is extremely high profile with respect to media. Despite this (and partially because of this), their committee experience problems that we do not encounter here.

“Changes to the Manitoba PAC”, utilized a panel from that province which is doing it’s best to catch up with a number of jurisdictions (including Alberta) regarding best practices.

“GPI Atlantic” is an independent, non-profit research and education organization is committed to the development of the “Genuine Progress Index” (GPI)—a new measure of sustainability, well-being, and quality of life. The Kingdom of Bhutan utilizes this model. Whether this is a more effective measure that the western world adopts is yet to be discerned.

“PAC-AG Collaboration” was an interactive session based on CCAF attributes of an effective PAC, with voting technology to elicit participant views. There were no real surprises in the opinions and observations of elected representatives, auditors-general, and staff.

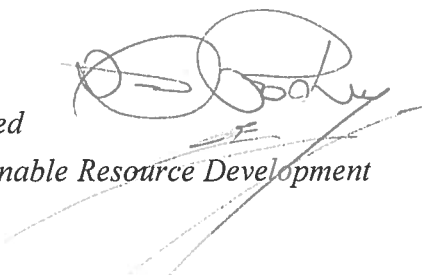
“Effective Questioning in PAC Sessions” was hosted in the Nova Scotia Legislative Chamber. It featured video clips and simulations which provoked discussions and generated strategies for effective questioning. Many delegates appreciated what I was able to share about the Alberta experience, since we utilize a number of strategies that other jurisdictions simply have not yet contemplated.

“Chairs/Vice Chairs Speak your Mind” was a rather lively session; and although it has not been the practice of the current Alberta chair to attend this conference, I would highly suggest it—for this session alone. In sharing the best practices in our province, it became clear that Alberta is the public accounts leader in Canada.

With great respect ~

Dave Rodney, MLA Calgary-Lougheed

& Parliamentary Assistant for Sustainable Resource Development





**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**  
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