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Wednesday 3 June 2009

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 3 juin 2009

**Standing Committee on
Public Accounts**

Special Report,
Auditor General

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

Rapport spécial,
vérificateur général

Chair: Norman W. Sterling
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Norman W. Sterling
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
COMPTES PUBLICS**

Wednesday 3 June 2009

Mercredi 3 juin 2009

The committee met at 0903 in committee room 1.

SPECIAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Good morning. Because we have a motion in front of the committee, the clerk has arranged for Hansard to be here and to have this as the open session. We will go to our normal closed session in terms of writing reports after we deal with the motion.

I'm going to ask Mr. Hardeman to put the motion first, and then I'm going to have Mr. McCarter make a few comments regarding the background to this motion.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I move that following the Auditor General's completion of his value-for-money audit of eHealth Ontario, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the Auditor General to release that chapter of his annual report in a special report to the Speaker; and

That prior to the tabling of this report, the Auditor General may inform the Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care of his opinions, observations or recommendations.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Mr. McCarter, would you have some information that's relevant to this?

Mr. Jim McCarter: Just by way of background for the committee members, as you know, we do 14 or 15 value-for-money audits each year, and this was one that we did start up. It was probably the last one we started up. We got it started up probably in December of last year. As the members may recall from our audit of the infectious diseases, the C. difficile, at the hospitals, under the Auditor General Act I have the mandate to table all of my value-for-money audits—basically, report once a year in an annual report. Consequently, this particular audit would be along the lines of any one of our value-for-money audit reports, and it would be tabled, as is our practice, in early December in our annual report. I think the minister has actually mentioned that in the House, did make it public that we were in the process of doing an audit of this area. As the members may recall, last year the committee did pass a motion with respect to the infectious diseases at the hospital. We tabled a report as soon as it was completed. So under normal circumstances, this would be tabled as part of our annual report.

I should make the committee aware, though, that I have been out of the country for most of the last week. I did get back mid-day yesterday, and I immediately had a conference call with David Caplan, the health minister, to discuss very briefly the work that we were doing. I did apprise the minister that while we were doing the work—and I was aware of the Premier's comment in the House that he would welcome any recommendations we had sooner rather than later—this would likely not be reported until December in our annual report unless, under section 17 of the Auditor General Act, he, as the minister, were to request that I table it on completion. The minister indicated to me that he thought that might be a good idea and, essentially, that he would take it under advisement. Anyway, later that afternoon I did get a letter from the minister indicating to me that he would be requesting that, under section 17 of the Auditor General Act, I make the report available once we had completed the audit.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): I should allow Mr. Hardeman—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Auditor General for bringing that forward.

Obviously, that somewhat does the same thing as this resolution, but having put the resolution, I would still like it voted on and passed here to make sure that the committee is in agreement with that.

I think we had the same debate for the C. difficile—and I have the Hansard here of it—of the requirement to ask the Auditor General to do this. I think, for consistency's sake, that it makes good sense that our committee follow that same process here. The reason, of course—with the C. difficile one, it was because of the health risk that the public could be exposed to while they were waiting for the report that could be mitigated if we got that report early. So one could say that this one is slightly different.

The reason that I am introducing this motion has to do with the fact that I think this one—with the other one, the problem could be measured. It seems to me that there are no measurable results for what is happening at eHealth. We know what they're looking for in the end, but there's no way of judging whether what they're doing has value for money until we get to the finish. There has been an awful lot of information that has come out that's, in my mind, a little scary as to what's going on there, and we have no way of deciding that changes should be made

now before we get to what would eventually be the end result. So that's why I think it's so important that we get an earlier report on this process.

The other thing: I didn't know that the—great minds do think alike, so I should have known that the minister would have come to the same conclusion. I know you're going to assume that I'm referring to my mind and his, and I'm not. I realize that in the press yesterday the Premier said, "I understand that the auditor is looking at this." If he wanted to come out with recommendations sooner rather than later, we would welcome those as well. So when I'm speaking of great minds thinking alike, it's mine and the Premier's, rather than mine and the minister's.

With that, I'm putting this motion forward—and I hope that the whole committee would support it—to move this forward to get the results from this as soon as possible so we can deal with any challenges that the eHealth process is causing to the people of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just to say that the New Democratic caucus will support that recommendation or request by the Conservative Party that we vote on this for the reasons that were just enunciated by Mr. Hardeman. Just to make sure we're clear that everybody's on the same page, this information should be made available as quickly as possible. So my question to the auditor is simply this: When do you expect to have the work done on that audit?

Mr. Jim McCarter: As indicated, it was probably one of the last value-for-money audits that we got started. Normally we'd be kind of wrapping that up in late summer, or September at the latest; however, we are having discussions as to what we can possibly do to expedite it. Given that there has been a fair bit of discussion in the Hansard, there are a couple of areas where we may do a bit of extra work as well, I should add. So, ballpark, we'd normally be looking at August/early September, but we are going to look to see if we can expedite it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The last question, is there any kind of interim information that you would be able to table prior to your final part of this value-for-money audit?

Mr. Jim McCarter: It's probably too early a stage to comment on that. We did talk about whether it would be possible to split the—yesterday, not telling tales out of school, but we met quickly before I had a chat with the minister and we did discuss whether it would be possible to maybe split the report and issue two reports. Our initial reaction is no; it would make it more difficult to really understand the substance of it. So it's a possibility but not a probability, if I could put it that way.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So it wouldn't be impossible for you to give an interim report prior to finishing this value-for-money audit on that particular—

Mr. Jim McCarter: If we did an interim report, it would have to be on certain components of the audit where we completed all our work, but I suspect that the items of the most public interest may not be those items.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Any comment over here? Ms. Sandals.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Just to say that I concur with the auditor in terms of, we had a similar discussion last year around C. difficile and gave the direction from the committee to release that early. As the auditor has mentioned, the minister has also asked for the audit to be released as soon as it's complete, so I think we're all in agreement. I would ask for a recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Any further discussion? No further discussion.

Ayes

Albanese, Hardeman, McNeely, Ouellette, Sandals, Van Bommel, Zimmer.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): I'd just note that M^{me} Gélinas had to step out to the House for a few minutes, and that's the reason she's not here. Okay? Carried. Thank you very much.

We'll now go into our closed session.

The committee continued in closed session at 0913.

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Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James ND)

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