

13th Assembly

Standing Committee on Government Operations

Report on the 1998/99 Main Estimates

Roy Erasmus, M.L.A.,
Chair

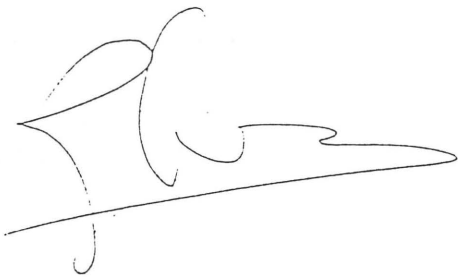
Standing Committee on Government Operations

January 23, 1998

THE HONOURABLE SAM GARGAN, M.L.A.
SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker,

Your Standing Committee on Government Operations has the honour of presenting its Report on the 1998/99 Main Estimates for the Legislative Assembly and its recommendations on issues with Government-wide implications, and commends it to the House.



Roy Erasmus, M.L.A.
Chair

Members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations

Roy Erasmus
M.L.A. Yellowknife North
Chair

Kevin O'Brien
M.L.A. Kivallivik
Deputy Chair

Seamus Henry
M.L.A. Yellowknife North

David Krutko
M.L.A. Mackenzie Delta

Michael Miltenberger
M.L.A. Thebacha

Edward Picco
M.L.A. Iqaluit

Tommy Enuaraq
M.L.A. Baffin Central

Alternate Members

Levi Barnabas
M.L.A. High Arctic

Floyd Roland
M.L.A. Inuvik

Jake Ootes
M.L.A. Yellowknife Centre

Staff Members

Doug Schauerte
Committee Clerk

Robert Collinson
Committee Researcher

Standing Committee on Government Operations

Report on the Review of the 1998/99 Main Estimates

Introduction

Although the Standing Committee on Government Operations' primary focus is to review issues which have territorial-wide implications, it is also charged with examining the budgets and financial management of boards and agencies that are outside the responsibility of any other Standing Committee. This includes the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations has always appreciated the high level of cooperation we have received from the Speaker and his staff in reviewing the Main Estimates and are optimistic that this cooperation will continue.

The Committee also recognizes the long hours and considerable work involved in preparing the material required for the Main Estimates review process and extends its thanks to all involved, particularly the staff at the Financial Management Board Secretariat.

Legislative Assembly

The Committee held a wide-ranging discussion of the operations of the Legislative Assembly in conjunction with its review of the Assembly's 1998/99 Main Estimates. Issues touched on included elections before and after Division, building maintenance issues, fire safety issues, the Chief Electoral Officer position, pension plan administration and services provided in the Speaker's Office.

The Committee is generally satisfied with the 1998/99 Main Estimates as presented by the Speaker. However, the Standing Committee on Government Operations wishes to comment on the following issues:

Interpreter/Translator Costs

The Committee appreciates the briefing on the current situation regarding the delivery of interpreter/translator services to the Legislative Assembly.

Committee members were concerned about the impact on interpreter/translator service delivery and the associated costs resulting from the privatization of portions of the Language Bureau. The Legislative Assembly must be able to provide language services in all of the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories. Former employees of the Languages Bureau have moved on to other opportunities within and outside Government, and shortages of qualified private-sector Dene language interpreters now exist. This shortage has impacted negatively on language services to Members of the Legislative Assembly and to the public.

When the privatization of the Language Bureau was first proposed, Members of the Committee expressed concern that although costs would initially be reduced, interpreter/translator services would not be more effectively delivered by the private sector.

In addition, there are serious concerns that the funding transferred to the Legislative Assembly to provide for this service will not be sufficient to cover the cost of language services for this or subsequent fiscal years. Members of the Committee have also heard concerns expressed that other departments and regional staff faces the same dilemma. The Committee intends to closely monitor issues related to the privatization of portions of the Language Bureau.

Review of Government-Wide Issues

As a part of the mandate of the Standing Committee on Government Operations, the Committee considered items referred from other Standing Committees of the Legislative Assembly, and reviewed issues with government-wide implications.

Human Resource Administration Costs

The issue of human resource administration costs was identified by other Committees and referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations. The concern is that there have been no savings realized by the Government as a result of the dismantling of the Department of Personnel.

The Committee is of the opinion that the departments have been forced to take on the human resource function without an adequate level of funding from the Government, and that because of this shortfall in funding, the departments have been required to use program delivery dollars to deal with the increased burden.

The Committee recommends that an analysis of the transfer of human resource administration functions to the departments from the Department of Personnel be undertaken to quantify the net results in terms of expenditures and efficiency. This analysis should include the following:

- 1. A comparison of the funding required by all departments to administer the human resource function in relation to the funding previously required to operate the Department of Personnel;*
- 2. A list of the responsibilities that were transferred to the Financial Management Board Secretariat from the Department of Personnel;*
- 3. An analysis of the additional funds now being spent by boards and agencies as a result of this change in service delivery;*
- 4. Information as to the present number of employees by department and region required for the human resource function compared to the numbers previously employed by the Department of Personnel. This should include employees at the board and agency level.*

Capital Spending Priorities

Committee Members received briefings from the Minister regarding the Public/Private Partnership initiative and, if the initiative is approved, the Committee looks forward to working with the Government further and reviewing proposed projects. The Committee also wishes to restate its position on capital spending priorities. During its review of the 1997/98 Capital Estimates and Business Plans, the Committee indicated that it would be supportive of capital projects, which are "essential to serve the basic needs of the communities". This would include projects such as schools, hospitals and health centers, housing, basic water/sewer and primary transportation links such as main roads and wharves necessary for supplies. The Committee's position has not changed. Any project proposed will have to serve the basic needs of a community as outlined above and should be subject to review and meaningful consultation by Members. Projects that do not meet these criteria will not merit serious consideration by Members of this Committee.

Keewatin Infrastructure Transfer

The Committee discussed the Keewatin Infrastructure Transfer proposal, and Members have serious concerns about its implementation. Committee Members feel that this proposal to transfer capital funding and associated operations and maintenance funding to the Keewatin Mayors Group essentially moves toward creating another level of government. Some of the Committee's questions, such as the amount of consultation done with stakeholders like Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Interim Commissioner's Office, remain unanswered. The Committee's major concern is that this initiative, which is a profound change to the way the GNWT conducts its business, is being proposed far too close to the time of division. There are too many other issues before this Government, without bringing new and potentially disruptive issues to the table. The Committee recommends that this proposal be postponed until after division.

Witnesses

Legislative Assembly

The Honourable Sam Gargan - Speaker

Mr. David Hamilton - Clerk

Mr. Myles Moreside - Director, Finance & Administration

Mr. Mark Dickey - Executive Assistant

