

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

June 3, 2008

Upon Recess of BMA

Mayor Guinta called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Alderman M. Roy, Gatsas, Sullivan, J. Roy, Osborne, Pinard,
O'Neil, Lopez, Shea, DeVries, Garrity, Smith, Ouellette, Domaingue

3. Resolution:

“Authorizing the Finance Officer to make certain budgetary closings for Fiscal Year 2008.”

On motion of Alderman M. Roy, duly seconded by Alderman Pinard, it was voted to waive reading of this Resolution.

On motion of Alderman Osborne, duly seconded by Alderman Pinard, it was voted that the Resolution ought to pass and be Enrolled.

Alderman Lopez stated the City of Manchester is at a critical crossroad. The costs to provide City services are up while revenues are down. A number of our schools have failing grades. At the same time there is a public outcry not to increase property taxes. In May Alderman Gatsas and I came up with an alternative budget for the City departments that were funds for City services Manchester residents have come to expect from the state's number one city. Again, Alderman Gatsas and I and the other Aldermen have worked together to come up with what we feel is a budget that is workable for the School District. When Mayor Guinta presented his budget, the School District's portion was not level funded. Because of the complexity of the School District's budget of \$140 million that Mayor Guinta set aside for the schools, it was challenging to say the least. Today's economy and the economy projected for the next year will be a tough one on everyone. We need, in addition to keeping expenses as low as possible, to keep in mind that one of the most important responsibilities of city government is to properly educate the children of the community. Alderman Gatsas and I knew we had to do what is right for the children and what is right for the taxpayers. Doing just that, coming up with what I call a responsible budget was not easy, as you

might imagine. The two of us spent a lot of time disagreeing before we came with an alternative budget for the School District that addresses major elements of the cost to educate our children. We believe we have come up with a budget for the School District that meets its needs and a budget that is good for Manchester. Once you've heard the presentation it is our hope that you will agree with us. At this time I would ask Alderman Gatsas to present our alternative budget of the Manchester School District.

Alderman Gatsas stated I certainly applaud the Mayor for starting these discussions. There is no question that the \$140 million, when he brought his proposal forward, certainly had impacts on the School District. And I think that during the last two months the Aldermen have certainly delved into this budget, worked very hard to find out what necessities were in the School District, heard about special education, heard about transportation, heard about the sending districts. And I think it's important that we move forward with ideas that are best for the educational system, especially for the students in Manchester, and certainly the taxpayers in Manchester. I find that sometimes when you listen long enough, and certainly I'm grateful for MCTV because you get to watch these programs if not once, maybe twice and maybe three times, you have the ability to take different things that Aldermen have presented and ask questions about and understand what their interests are so that you can formulate something that you can get total agreement on. And I know that on this Board sometimes it's difficult to get total agreement, but we certainly try to do that every time we participate in discussion about major situations that are before us. So with that, what you're going to see before you is...obviously we saw some 31 or 32 items that the School District had presented to us, not necessarily in the importance that I believe is best suited for the children in Manchester. And I know I'm not an educator, but I look at a lot of different avenues when I look at what's important for children, and safety certainly is paramount. So I started with a number of \$140 million, and that was the bottom scale that was constructed. The first thing I looked at was transportation, which was \$365,240. I don't think any of us would want an eight year old child having to walk two miles and possibly be abducted. So that to me, the safety of the children, is most important. Walking down Bodwell Road with no sidewalks is not anything that any parent wants to endure or think about. The next thing is the SRO's in the schools. That's \$346,123. I think that we've had enough experiences and heard enough reports throughout this country, about what can happen if you don't have those people in the classes or in the schools themselves. I think it's important that we understand that. And again, that's a safety issue that I don't think anybody can disagree should be one of the very top priorities. Next we will start with some of the things that I believe certainly have given me an opportunity in life. I speak for myself, being a lifelong resident and matriculating through the Manchester School District. The things that I learned in

this district, possibly I can accredit them to the successes that I've had in life. The educational process, when I look back at my teachers, Miss Foley, Mr. Adams in geometry...I look back at my elementary teachers, Miss Ganom and Mr. Bernier in the eighth grade and I can go on through a list, and I look at every one of those people, and every one of them made an impact in my life. And I'm sure that there are teachers in this School District that make an impact on children every single day. So, the next one that I put in was full-day kindergarten and readiness. I believe that the \$855,000 couldn't be spent better than making sure that the children are ready for an education as they move through the Manchester School District. The next three items you will see are the middle school assistant principals at \$308,000; the four elementary school assistant principals at \$365,000; and the three high school assistant principals at \$340,000. Those are the people that have direct contact with the students in the educational system. I think they're vital to the system. I think that everything that you see is demonstrated by their willingness to work with children on a daily basis. The next one is reading specialist. I think that's important. I remember being in group three reading, and we didn't have reading specialists back then, but I understood that I was in group three and the kids that were in group one read a little bit better, and you always tried to advance in those different reading classes. But I think they're important to the children today. Gifted and talented...I could never tell you that I was one of the gifted and talented students, but I think it's important that we look at them and give them the same ideals that they can grow in the educational process. Extra curricular activities, I think those are vitally important. There is not question that students throughout the District look at things and have different interests. The interests aren't there for every student to say that they are an athlete, but the National Honor Society is just as important as the football player that plays on a Friday night because they're the examples that lead. So I think it's important that we put extra curricular activities in place, probably before sports, and that's why these numbers as you see them, I felt were most important to students as you look at the process. You then have music and art. My mother did buy me a violin once. It lasted for two weeks, and my father said you'd better start playing sports again. The next number is athletics. That's \$1,787,000. Unequivocally, the largest city in the state of New Hampshire must have athletics. That was an opportunity that I look back on, and a lot of the people that you see before you in Manchester that come before this Board can owe whatever success they have to athletics. Mental toughness to move forward in life...and you always understood that if you were knocked down that you got up and you proceeded again to compete and to try to win again. And I think that's very important. Community partnerships...New Hampshire JAGS. I participated in a presentation that they had about a week and a half ago. And I think it's important that we talk about Jobs for American Graduates. These aren't the best students in the School District, but they are certainly students that unequivocally try every single day to better themselves. I looked at the projects that they had all developed some two

weeks ago and the competition that they were in on a state-wide basis, and I was very impressed. This is not a program we should be eliminating. Band and orchestra, I think that's important, and again, the numbers that you see in the right-hand column follow suit, not with numbers that I participated in but the numbers that the School District presented to us in the sheet that showed some 35 cuts. Number fourteen is Ready for Success, another program that I believe gets students ready to matriculate through society. ROTC, some people will say, that's not at the top of the list, and I agree, but it certainly builds character and certainly the students that spoke before us when we sat there for some six hours, and I was starting to really believe that we made these cuts...I couldn't understand why people were assuming we were making the cuts because we never made the cuts. We just listen to the presentations and certainly I applaud the people for being there because their voices were heard, and that's why we're all here as a group trying to participate to move this forward. The next is four administrative assistants: two in the high schools and two in the middle schools. We've just invested \$105 million in the buildings in the School District. We should not be cutting maintenance. We've put \$450,000 back in for maintenance to the School District. Number eighteen, the BLIC's and the PE coordinators, I think are an important integral part of the School District. The last line is the first line that you see that I've made a cut. I've cut an assistant superintendent for the elementary schools. There was already a cut in the budget that was coming forward to us as the assistant superintendent in the secondary schools. We have a new superintendent coming to town. I think it gives him an opportunity to build his team and put forward a different plan, so that we understand what those building blocks are and what the necessities are for better education to the School District. I don't think it stops anybody from growing. I think it gives Mr. Brennan an opportunity to put together a different program. I looked at programs in Nashua. I looked at other programs throughout the country that are in different states that talk about different school districts. And I think it's imperative that we get as much information..and as I say, touching to the students as close as we can, versus further away. So with that proposed budget...and I don't talk about a number of \$146 million, because I think it's important that we understand that we as a Board think that these things are very, very important. So it's not about talking about a number, taking that number back and having it dissected because then we're going to be right back to where we were some four or five years ago when I heard we needed \$1 million for maintenance and the budget was \$140 million, and it was \$1 million for maintenance, and I made the suggestion that we hold the \$1 million on our side and they could draw down on the maintenance to do the maintenance of the schools. And then the vote...I believe it was thirteen to one, that we gave the \$1 million to the district and the \$1 million never got to the maintenance. So it's very important and crucial to understand that this isn't a number, but these are proposals that we believe directly influence the education of students.

Alderman Lopez stated we looked at the Expendable Trust, recommending taking \$1 million out and replacing some of the old computers in the schools, which was number eight on the priority list that the School Department gave us. That was \$200,000. Then we looked at the Computer Notebooks and after discussion it was a very important tool that the teachers and others needed in order to provide necessary information in a faster form, so to speak. That was \$126,000. We restored Math K-5, which was number seventeen on the priority list of \$303,077. For Supplies and Textbooks, we added \$200,000. That was a major issue and that was item number nineteen. And then the Student Information System, we have the leftover \$170,923. We also have known for a number of years...I've known and some of my colleagues that are Aldermen now have fought for a Student Information System. That Student Information System costs approximately \$264,000. The way we're going to get to that \$264,000 is the other issue with the School Department and the City; it has always been Gill Stadium. Gill Stadium has always been a topic of every budget we've ever done in the City. So effective in FY2009, the team that plays at Gill Stadium pays \$75 a game and \$50 for practice. Looking at that, we're not taking any money away from the \$162,000 for athletics, so that would give you, if you add \$162,000 to the \$170,000 you come to \$304,000 and you can buy your information system to track the students within the School Department. I would like to echo my colleague, with a new superintendent coming in, I believe that he has a major task ahead of him, and I believe that this is the blueprint that we have come up. As he moves forward in the School District. There is no question. Things are going to have to change on the City side. We all have to re-look at what we're doing and see whether or not we're doing it right, or are we being efficient to the aspect of doing it. That is the end of our presentation. My colleague and I are ready to answer any questions.

Alderman Gatsas stated I think it's important we understand that when we came forward with the City budget, there was a \$1.2 million reduction in spending. Coming forward with the School Board budget, it just so happens that it's about \$1.2 million in a reduction from last year's budget. I think it's a workable budget. I think it's a budget that has the interests of the children at heart, and I think that's what we all work for, to understand how clearly this Board considers the proposal that we've brought forward. I've kind of asked everybody to sign a contract so that people would understand that this was of great importance to this Board. I don't think any of us take our duties lightly here. I notice that there are people from other sending districts. They take their duties very seriously there as we do here. I notice that my colleagues from the School Board are here. I respectfully thank them for coming and participating. It's a proposal that I believe that the City, at least from the Aldermanic side, believes that we need to put in place to make sure the students in Manchester move forward. And I'll certainly take any questions from any Aldermen regarding what we have before us.

Alderman Ouellette stated I certainly don't have any questions about the proposal, but I do have some comments. Although Alderman Gatsas and I may disagree on the order of priority, I think during the presentation he made it quite clear that the number one concern to this Board, as has been the number one concern to the School District, is the effect to direct student services. And I think that this proposal from Alderman Gatsas and Alderman Lopez does just that. It protects the direct student services. To say the least, last year's budget at \$147.2 million was a lean budget. That is an understatement. I believe the District right now is showing somewhere in the vicinity of a \$250,000 surplus. That's not a lot of money to show for a surplus, but I applaud the District in being frugal with their expenses, being careful of not overspending their expenses. However, this budget is a cut from the proposed budget and the approved budget from the Board of School Committee, so they are still going to have to sharpen their pencils. They are still going to have to find ways of saving money. I'm told that there are some proposals that have been written down and thought of and are being gone through right now, somewhere about four pages I believe. Committee Member Craig has come up with some ideas on where they can save money. I think the Board is going to have to continue to look at those ideas and continue to come up with ways to save money. This is a very difficult budget, because although you were receiving a \$1.2 million decrease in your appropriation from this year, factor in the contractual increases, the new superintendent salary increase. Just right there alone you're going to have some tough challenges on that Board and some tough decisions to make. In terms of the assistant superintendent of elementary education, if you find savings within your budget, I don't think there is anything that precludes you from hiring anybody that you may want to fill positions that you feel needed, provided you are within your \$146,056,000 number. Those are my thoughts on the budget. I applaud my colleagues for actually taking all of our input and coming up with a list. Again, the priority list may not be in the same fashion as I would have crafted it, but pretty much these are the key issues that I thought were very important for the District, not to progress, because I don't call this a progressive budget, but just to tread water for the year that we're having with the problems with the revenues.

Alderman Shea stated first of all I want to commend as I did with the City budget, Alderman Gatsas and Alderman Lopez. Obviously they did a tremendous job, and certainly other Aldermen have contributed. The one area that I would like to see movement in...and I'm directing this to the School Board members...is number eight, the Gifted and Talented Program. I believe that this program is so essential for our community. I'm sure that people from Bedford have a gifted and talented program, and I'm sure that in Hooksett they do. And this program is so essential for keeping people within our community, and this program should be looked at very carefully and it should be started in my judgment with children who are

gifted and talented at the fourth grade level. And these children should be selected. They should be taught by teachers that are dedicated and then it should be expanded to the fifth grade, the sixth grade, the seventh grade, the eighth grade. And then when they go into high school and they can take Advanced Placement, kids have to compete with other kids that go to prep schools, that go to schools that have gifted and talented, and when kids leave our public schools, whether they leave them in the eighth grade and go to Derryfield or leave them to go to Memorial High School, they should have the background to compete because they're competing, not only with kids from Manchester, Bedford and other places, they are competing with kids from India, from China, from other places. And these kids that are gifted and talented should have the same rights as other kids who have special needs. These kids have special needs, and this program should be developed accordingly. So I believe, Your Honor, that although this \$111,000...it's up to the Board members to start working on this and to utilize their talents in order to develop that program. And I can't stress that enough.

Alderman Lopez stated I think one of the things I'll bring to attention because some Aldermen have asked me is what does this mean? What does it mean in the increase in taxes? That question is going to come up. It goes from \$16.57 to \$17.20. The increase is 3.66%, and if you want to break it down it's sixty-three cents on a thousand and \$157 on a \$250,000 piece of property, so an average of \$13 extra a month.

Alderman Domaingue stated I came from the School Board, so I think that the School Board budget process is very close to both myself and Alderman Ouellette. We grappled with it for the two years preceding our sitting on this Board. I talked to a number of educators; I talked to a number of parents; I've talked to a number of constituents that are afraid of their tax bill going up. This has probably been the most difficult process that I've gone through as an elected official. I commend Alderman Lopez and Alderman Gatsas for their work on this budget. As a former attendee of Manchester public schools...I started here in kindergarten and I went through to graduation. I would not have gone to college on scholarship, nor would I have gone to law school, were it not for the work that my teachers put in for the athletic program, for the gifted and talented program, for the music program, and for extra curricular activities. So while this is a tax increase, and it's one that I fought very hard to prevent from the onset, it is absolutely necessary to funding education adequately in the City of Manchester. I look at my peers now that I graduated with, many of whom have come back to this City to teach classes. They're teaching the next generation of teachers that will return and continue to educate children so that Manchester can continue to propel itself into the future. I would urge all of you to look carefully at this budget, and I would urge the School Board to support it and move forward, looking at innovative ways to restructure

the administration and ways to move forward in a productive manner for the future.

Alderman DeVries stated I'd like to start off with a couple of points of clarification. Alderman Gatsas, it is your understanding that the list of proposals on the three pages of detail that you just went over with your budget explanation are in fact priorities and expectations of this Board that we expect to see funded within the school budget that are not open for deletion when they go about their own line item work. Is that correct?

Alderman Gatsas responded I think it's important that we understand that this isn't a number of \$146 million. This is a proposal of \$146 million. I think that should be a clear message, and we're looking for the School Board to understand that the signatures that you saw before you is a serious, serious issue. When we sat and listened for six hours, it was six hours of cuts that we did. We now have turned around and put those cuts back into a budget. So it's a proposed budget that I think that the Board would understand that we're serious about.

Alderman DeVries stated thank you very much, Alderman. I have one other question. Understanding that the new superintendent of schools will be starting July 1st, I do believe that he may have some thoughts on the different budget initiatives from his perspective. Would you suggest that if he differs with anything that we came up with in our own budget and that the School Board may embrace when they go through their deliberations, that he may make maybe a proposal to the School Board as well as a proposal back to this Board to just explain why he might have some different thoughts on funding and budgeting as he goes forward with his first year?

Alderman Gatsas responded there is no question. I know Tom Brennan and I have a lot of respect for him, and he's got a great opportunity to perform, to work in what I feel is the best school district in the state of New Hampshire. And it's going to give him an opportunity to reorganize. He may feel that there are issues that we've talked about in here that he may disagree on, but I don't think it should be a wholesale sell or eliminating positions to put other things in. I think he has an opportunity. I think that the board that he's going to be working with certainly is going to give him every opportunity to bring what he thinks forward that's going to make for a better district, and certainly I think that my colleagues on this Board will do whatever we need to do to help him achieve that. So I think that it's important that he comes forward, and I think that there at least should be a dialogue that if there is going to be a change, people understand the seriousness that we think of the proposal that we've brought forward.

Alderman DeVries stated thank you for that answer, Alderman, and I know we all

look forward to having the new superintendent join our fine City and look forward to his good work and his proposals. My final question, Your Honor, would go to you. I guess I'm grateful that you joined us in this collaborative work to come up with a proposal for the School Board, and I'm hoping that you might address that because this has been a difficult budget proposal for several of us, and I would be the first to say that I had difficulty with the number. I know my end of the City has had some particular difficulties keeping up with just the cost increases that have come from, as you put it, your kitchen table discussions. So I would be remiss if I didn't say that the number was one that makes we wince just a tad. And I think I've shared some of those thoughts with you, Your Honor, and I guess I'm just hoping to hear how you might be addressing this city-wide because there are many of our constituents that we share that, though they wanted us to fulfill our obligation to fund properly their schools will be concerned about the tax increase number.

Mayor Guinta stated with every budget process I've gone through, whether as an Alderman or as Mayor, I've learned something from each one of those processes. When I first started the process for this budget around December, I had very grave concerns about our ability to raise revenue as a city, and the concerns about declining revenues but probably for fiscal year 2010. Those concerns weighed very heavily on me as I crafted the budget. As I talked about during this process, I was also concerned with three basic costs that families had to consider in terms of keeping their quality of life level: their grocery bill which went up about one-third over the last year, their gas bill, and their home heating oil bill. The total of those three numbers for the average family in the City was about \$5,500 over last year. As we started the process and I looked at the requests from the District and the departments, we were looking at a 16% tax hike. I felt that the City was not in a position to support or approve the notion of a 16% tax hike. So, it required of me to place a very frugal budget forward at the end of March. I agonized quite a bit over the recommendations for the departments as well as the District. But I have faith in the process. I've worked with almost every member of this Board in one capacity or another over the last several years, and I consider you not just friends and colleagues but people who are true to budgeting and true members of the community who would like to do everything they can to put the best interests of the City forward. And while I knew that putting forward a \$140 million number, particularly for schools, would raise some eyebrows in the City, would certainly cause some consternation and even anger, it did one very, very important thing. It created a dialogue and a debate like no other year that at least I can remember, that had to provide dollars for education, had to deliver the service of education, and I think it opened the eyes of not just the elected bodies but the people of our City about how we can improve and must improve education. I think most people here know that I don't believe solely in increases as the method to improve education. There is a financial component to a good education but it's not the sole

component. There are a lot of policies, a lot of methods, and a lot of people who are involved in executing a strategic plan. As we move through the process, I continue to hear from members of both boards and from the public, and I heard lots of varying concerns – taxes, education. What is the level of education that's going to be provided in the City? And I think everybody can agree that we want to provide the best education we can. But I was always mindful of the fact that the money that is appropriated comes from the people of the City. We are stewards of those dollars and we have every obligation and responsibility to invest those dollars as wisely as possible. And if it means that I'm going to have to hold everyone's feet to the fire for the betterment of the process, then I'm willing to do it, despite some of the criticisms and critiques that I receive. I do it because I think it's a prudent and responsible thing to do, particularly when you have less revenue that you're anticipating. Leadership from an elected official is not about always saying yes and it's not about always saying no, but it is about making prudent, difficult decisions. It was very clear to me after the School Board decided not to rift, that they placed a heavy burden and responsibility on every member of this Board. But in private and public conversations, it was very clear that every member of this Board wanted to do the right thing. Through this process I was striving to have the lowest tax impact possible. I don't agree with every number that was voted on on the City side. I don't agree with every number or line item on this proposal. But I do agree that this Board has worked in a very professional, collegial and very business-like manner to not be political but to try to determine what is in the best interest of the City. That requires the ability of me as well as you for compromise, for dialogue and discussion. I join the group in moving this District forward at the numbers that were proposed. I am going to do everything I can in the fiscal year 2009 budget to manage effectively and efficiently, establish surpluses, and I am going to ask the School District, both the board and the administration, to look at his process and understand that next year we're going to go through it again, and that it's going to require changes in how we deliver educational services in this City. It is going to require programmatic audits. It is going to require greater accountability. It is going to require desk audits of every position. It is going to require greater oversight and accountability of everybody who is in a classroom or everybody who is associated with a classroom because I think that is part of the component to improving education. And I'm actually very satisfied that this Board took its job as seriously as it did. And while many people have some concerns with the end of the process and the final number, we can broadly and generally agree that we're doing the best we can with limited resources this particular fiscal year. I think the objective was trying to strike that balance between taxpayers' ability to pay and the services that we want to provide that we've come to expect and demand. No number is the magic number, but I think we struck a balance. It doesn't absolve anybody of their responsibility. As I said, I'm going to manage the FY2009 budget very judiciously. There will be times when members of the public or the Board ask for

approvals on expenditures and I'll have to ask the Board to wait, because I think it's prudent to work through the economic challenges that we have, be fiscally responsible, be very conservative in our spending, and I'm going to ask the School District to do the same. They have the responsibility just like we do. I think they've learned that through this process. Again, it wasn't a perfect process. But there is a proposal before the City that does allow a good, strong overall educational opportunity for every child who attends our public schools. And I think that was the objective, given the challenging resources we have in this fiscal year, and I think with the best of our ability, we've met our obligation.

Alderman DeVries stated Your Honor, thank you very much. I just have one final comment and that would just be a word of thanks to both Alderman Gatsas and Alderman Lopez for one of the rare times that we have signed on unanimously to a contract. I think that took particular stewardship on their part, and they worked very hard and very collaboratively to accomplish that goal, and I congratulate both of them.

Alderman Garrity stated again, thanks to Alderman Lopez and Alderman Gatsas for bringing a proposal together in front of us. I cannot stress enough that 15 of us have signed onto this budget proposal and I cannot let the School Board know strongly enough that the reason why it's like that is because the priorities that Alderman Gatsas and Alderman Lopez have listed are the priorities of this Board. It's important that those things get funded, and if they're not funded, I don't know if there is an alternative or anything like that, Alderman Gatsas, but that's what's important to this Board, all 15 of us. It's unique when you have all 15 of us sign a document that says, 'yup, we're going to raise taxes 3.66%. That's very unique and it doesn't happen often, but it's important that we see these programs, transportation and so forth, funded in the School District, and I cannot stress to the School Board strongly enough that those be funded.

Alderman Smith stated I'd like to apologize to Mr. Gatsas and Mr. Lopez. In regards to athletics, anybody knows that I've been in the forefront of athletics and I've agreed to disagree on many occasions, but I think that what we've done at Gill Stadium is a fair and just agreement. Everybody will be paying the same amount for the use of the facility. I like that. I especially thank Parks & Recreation for their cooperation. Thank you very much, fellas.

Alderman Lopez stated once again I would say that all the elected officials, instead of them and us, we are the officials elected to work together and we have a joint meeting of the School Board and Board of Mayor and Aldermen at 5:00 on the June 5th, Thursday night. We hope it won't be very long and I am sure that some of the School Board members, because I have talked to them, they will be looking over this. I would hope that they join us, the 14 of us and the Mayor, that believe

that this is the right way to go, to start from a ground zero, a plan to move forward with the new superintendent coming in. Are we going to have problems in the future? Absolutely. Let's solve them one at a time, and this is one of the problems we must solve.

Alderman Gatsas stated certainly I would like to ask my colleagues from the School Board if they wouldn't join us so that there would be another 14 signatures on that document, so that the students and the parents and the taxpayers of the City understand that we are all joining together to make sure education is moving forward in the right direction. We can provide the paper for you if you are in short supply.

TABLED ITEM

4. Resolution:

“Authorizing the Finance Officer to effect a transfer of Forty Eight Thousand Dollars (\$48,000) from Contingency to the Manchester Police Department.”

This item remained on the table.

There being no further business, on motion of Alderman Gatsas, duly seconded by Alderman Garrity, it was voted to adjourn.

A True Record. Attest.

Clerk of Committee