

Title: Monday, March 7, 2005 Legislative Offices Committee

Date: 05/03/07

Time: 5:42 p.m.

[Mrs. Tarchuk in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good evening, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order and welcome everyone to our first committee meeting of the 26th Legislature. For those of you that are new, I think you'll find this committee quite interesting, meaningful, rewarding.

All of you would have received meeting packages Thursday, the 3rd.

Actually, before we start, if we can just go around and identify ourselves so that's recorded on the *Hansard*. Maybe, Laurie, we'll start with you.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I'm delighted to welcome everyone to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. My name is Laurie Blakeman, and I represent the constituency that has the Legislative Assembly in it.

Thank you.

Dr. Pannu: I'm Raj Pannu, MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, and happy to return to this committee as a member.

Mr. Griffiths: Doug Griffiths. I'm the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright, and the first time I've sat on any of these committees, so I'm looking forward to the whole process.

Mr. Marz: Richard Marz, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency, one of the most beautiful parts of the province.

Mr. Lougheed: Rob Lougheed, MLA for Strathcona.

Mr. Ducharme: Hi. Denis Ducharme, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and it's certainly a pleasure to come back in the position as vice-chair.

The Chair: Janis Tarchuk, MLA for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

Mr. Strang: Ivan Strang, West Yellowhead. That's Edson, Hinton, Jasper, and Grande Cache.

Mr. Flaherty: Jack Flaherty of the St. Albert constituency.

[The following staff of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer introduced themselves: Mr. Fjeldheim, Ms McKee-Jeske, Mr. Resler, and Mr. Sage]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

You all have a copy of the agenda. I wonder if someone would move that we adopt the agenda as distributed.

Ms Blakeman: I'll do that. Sure.

The Chair: All those in favour? Any opposed? Okay. That motion is carried.

As stated in the cover letter that was in your meeting package, we need to formally pass a motion regarding the request for a supplementary estimate from the Chief Electoral Officer.

Before I maybe open it up to questions, just to give you a little bit of what has transpired in the last couple of months. The Chief

Electoral Officer submitted a request on October 18, 2004, to the Minister of Finance for supplementary funding to cover the estimated costs of the senatorial election. A special warrant was signed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on October 21 providing for an accountable advance to be issued to the CEO in the amount of \$2.88 million. One of the conditions of the warrant is that the accountable advance be repaid by a supplementary estimate by March 31, 2005.

This item has been included in the financial transactions being tabled by Alberta Finance tomorrow, March 8, and a motion by this committee authorizing the supplementary estimate is required. The full \$2.88 million was not required for the senatorial election, and the 2005-2006 budget submission for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer addresses the return of the surplus to general revenue. So that is the purpose of today's meeting. Sorry for the short notice, but we were trying to accommodate tomorrow's date.

I should say, actually for everyone as well as the new members, that at our next meeting we'll go through an orientation of the purpose of the committee, and in fact there will be a package going out within the week that lays out that orientation. Later on in today's meeting we'll set out some possible dates for that.

I wonder if we should get the motion on the floor first and then discuss it. It doesn't matter one way or the other really. We've got Brian here, so if anybody has any questions regarding this motion, maybe we'll just move to questions.

Laurie.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks, and thanks to the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff for making themselves available to us at the meeting today.

Two questions. This is an unbudgeted amount of money. Correct?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Okay. Was the Chief Electoral Officer expecting to budget a senatorial selection in connection with an election if it had been in the next fiscal year at all? Was there any anticipation of this? For example, if the election would have been held in the '05-06 fiscal year, which at one point we were sort of expecting, would there have been a senatorial selection budgeted amount included in that?

Mr. Fjeldheim: I wouldn't have known about that unless we were advised in accordance with the legislation that we would be responsible for conducting that. No, unless I'd received information, we would not have included that in our '05-06 budget.

Ms Blakeman: At what point were you notified that the chief electoral office would be responsible for running a senatorial selection election?

Mr. Fjeldheim: I'm just looking across here because I'm trying to recall what the exact date was, and I'm looking for some help. It was in August sometime that we were advised.

Ms Blakeman: Well into the fiscal year then?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Is there any performance measurement or any kind of measurement on which we can judge whether the money achieved the goals it was set out to achieve? Was there any kind of goal setting that went around with this?

Mr. Fjeldheim: In terms of our administration, yes, we certainly had some goals set. We wanted to get the senatorial selection process in place. Obviously, that required a great deal of work. A number of new forms are required and so on. We increased the pay that was given to the election officials because it's important to remember that we are running now two elections on the same day, so poll books, all the forms, all the required materials were doubled up on. We have to keep everything separate. We're running an election to elect members to the Legislative Assembly, and we're also now running an election for Senators-in-waiting. So, certainly, we looked at that. In terms of, "Was it money well spent?" I believe that would be a political question.

Ms Blakeman: No, I was searching more for – we often see set out in business plans from government departments but also from legislative officers a series of expectations, performance measurements if you will, in which there is an attempt to achieve them. I'm wondering if there was anything set out that went along with the senatorial selection, and it sounds like not.

Mr. Fjeldheim: No.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

5:50

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Mr. Ducharme: If there are no further questions, I'd like to move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request by the Chief Electoral Officer for a supplementary estimate in the amount of \$2.88 million to defray the cost of the senatorial election held on November 22, 2004.

The Chair: Are there any questions?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Excuse me. I'm going to have Glen explain this. We are asking for less money because the amount that we budgeted for is not the actual that we spent. Glen, would you explain that, please.

The Chair: But I thought that we had – oh, okay. Well, go ahead and explain. My understanding is that we had to pass a motion endorsing the amount that you got on the understanding that there would be a portion repaid.

Mr. Resler: Correct. From what we're looking at, there was a revised supplementary estimate request, and that's a request of \$1,018,000, reduced from the \$2.88 million.

Mr. Ducharme: The reason I phrased the motion as I did was because of the comments that the chair had delivered earlier, that the initial request was \$2.8 million and that whatever funds were not expended would be returned to general revenue.

Mr. Fjeldheim: We had some instructions regarding this. Just bear with us for half a minute, please.

The Chair: Denis, can you repeat the motion?

Mr. Ducharme: Yes. The motion that I made was that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request by the Chief Electoral Officer for a supplementary estimate in the amount of \$2.88 million to defray the cost of the senatorial election held on November 22, 2004.

Mr. Flaherty: Madam Chairman, is it appropriate, before we vote on this, to find out, get a detailed outline of where the dollars were spent? You know, the gentleman was kind enough to explain that it hasn't been clearly defined where all that money went, but we would be then looking at that later, at another meeting, would we?

The Chair: Go ahead, Brian.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes. All that information is certainly forthcoming. We've haven't finished paying all the bills yet, in fact. So when all that is finished, then we will show you, of course, what was paid for elections staff, what portion went to pay for rental, what portion went for advertising, and so on.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions? Laurie.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Clarification. So the original warrant coming out of Executive Council was for \$2.88 million. The actual amount used or needed in a supplementary supply is \$1.018 million. Am I straight on this now?

Mr. Resler: Almost.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Dr. Pannu: Brian, you have just observed that this \$1,018,000 is not the final amount. Or is it the final amount? You said that there are some bills coming in. Are they included?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yeah. The amounts that we're requesting will cover the bills that are still coming in. We're pretty well finished now, but there are still a few coming in. So in answer to this gentleman's question, we don't know the final amount yet definitively on the cost, but the amount that's being requested here now will cover everything.

Dr. Pannu: How do you know that if you don't know what the bills are?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Because Glen has a very good idea of what is outstanding. Of course, we keep track of how much we're still owing, so we know how much more we have to pay.

Dr. Pannu: So the invoices are there; you haven't paid out. Is that right?

Mr. Fjeldheim: It hasn't gone through the system yet, in effect.

Mr. Resler: Most invoices are in.

Dr. Pannu: Mostly? Not quite?

Mr. Resler: It's a timing issue as far as the information coming in for payment. Our preliminary projections for the Senate nominee election was the \$2.88 million. The revised forecasts have come in. It's going to be reduced to about \$1.9 million as the final cost for Senate nominee. Because we have unexpended funds from the enumeration and election, not all those funds are required, so we're only requesting the \$1.018 million in supplementary funds as far as what is going to show up as additional funding. The rest will be returned.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Brian, you look like you want to add something there.

Mr. Fjeldheim: I just want to make sure that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona follows that when we budgeted for that election and that enumeration, we had unexpended funds there, so we used those unexpended funds to assist in paying for the Senate nominee election.

Dr. Pannu: Okay. May I ask a question?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Certainly.

Dr. Pannu: The unexpended funds came from where?

Mr. Fjeldheim: The unexpended funds came from the enumeration and election budget that was approved by this committee.

Dr. Pannu: Okay. The provincial Assembly election budget.

Mr. Fjeldheim: That's correct.

Dr. Pannu: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Karen just wants to add something to this.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Madam Chairman, the only order that the committee has before it is Treasury Board directive 06/2004, and that is the directive that refers to the \$2.88 million. Understandably, the balance of the money will be returned, but the \$2.88 million was what was initially provided for in the accountable advance and now has to be repaid. The balance of it can be looked after through the budget process, with the return to general revenue of the funds not required.

Ms Blakeman: So, then, what we're trying to do here today is to ratify the advance directive that came out of Executive Council.

The Chair: That's right.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

The Chair: Any other questions? All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed?

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Chair: Okay. That motion was carried.

Ms Blakeman: Could we have the noes noted, please?

The Chair: Okay.

[For the motion: Mr. Ducharme, Mr. Flaherty, Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Loughheed, Mr. Marz, Mr. Strang]

[Against the motion: Ms Blakeman, Dr. Pannu]

The Chair: Karen had sent a note asking if you could bring your calendars to see if there's a possibility of looking at Tuesday or Wednesday of next week to do an orientation and take a look at the budgets of the officers. We'd be looking at 5:30. Wednesdays will not work, and Tuesdays won't work. What about Monday at 5:30?

Okay. I wonder if you should just quickly send out a polling tomorrow, and we'll just find out because we're missing two members, and probably we should give them the benefit of contributing to this discussion. But for sure Monday is out for one here, and Tuesday and Wednesday are not good for the other members.

Ms Blakeman: Tuesday is Liberal caucus meeting, so none of us are available.

The Chair: Okay.

I wonder if I could have a motion to adjourn. Richard. All those in favour? Okay. That motion is carried.

Thank you so much for joining us. We'll send out a memo tomorrow and poll the members and then meet next week. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

