

Title: Monday, March 14, 2005 Legislative Offices Committee

Date: 05/03/14

Time: 11:58 a.m.

[Mrs. Tarchuk in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order. Everyone should have received at their offices last Thursday a copy of the meeting binder. I wonder if at this time we could have someone move that we adopt the agenda as distributed.

Mr. Strang: I so move.

The Chair: Okay. Done. All those in favour? Any opposed? Motion carried.

Now, if you look in the binder under tab 3, we have a little bit of, particularly for the new members, orientation information. Under 3, tab A, we have a one-page excerpt from the committees of the Legislative Assembly practical guide, and it provides an overview of the activities of the committee. As noted, the committee's primary functions are to review the operations and annual budget submissions of the officers of the Legislative Assembly as well as other issues which may be brought before the committee by an officer. "The Committee also reviews the Officers' salaries on an annual basis."

You'll notice at the back of your meeting binders we've also included copies of the various acts to assist you with your duties as a member of the committee, and as well Karen has distributed annual reports for each of the officers.

As you know, Karen Sawchuk is our committee clerk.

Mr. Flaherty: I wonder if I could just ask Karen through the chair: I seem to be missing the first page on this 3(a).

The Chair: It only is one page, Jack. That's all it is.

Mr. Flaherty: There's only one page? Okay. Sorry about that.

The Chair: The committee may also call upon Senior Parliamentary Counsel from the Legislative Assembly Office should there be issues that arise where we require their assistance.

General meetings are held at the call of the chair, and generally Karen will contact members to determine their availability for a number of dates. Meeting notices are circulated to members once a meeting date and time are set, and meeting binders are delivered the week prior to the meeting. Our meetings are recorded by *Hansard*, and transcripts are provided to members usually, well, fairly quickly. There are instances where the committee may wish to discuss an issue in private; for example, if discussion is related to the specific salaries for each of the officers. In these cases a motion is made to move in camera, *Hansard* stops recording, and the meeting room is cleared of all participants excepting the committee proper. We follow the rules set out in the Standing Orders, and if there are procedural questions or challenges, Senior Parliamentary Counsel may be asked to provide assistance.

If you look at 3(d) in your binders, we have a copy of the 2005-06 committee budget estimates. Before we open it up for discussion, if someone would like to move that the budget be adopted as presented. Okay, Rob. Is there any discussion? Karen, you might want to just address the basics of the budget. We've left it status quo except for an increase of \$1,000. I see looking at last year's that our actuals are far lower than our estimates because of lack of participation of the committee during the election.

Mrs. Sawchuk: No, Madam Chair. Actually, it's because the

committee likely would have had another one or two days of meetings, but the election writ was dropped, so the committee was dissolved, so we only landed up having one meeting. Those meetings are generally held outside of session, so we try to provide additional funding for that. We didn't wind up having those meetings, so the dollars weren't expended.

Travel: the same thing. We provide in our travel budget for members to attend two different conferences. One is the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, or COGEL conference, you'll hear it referred to. The other one is the CCPAC conference, the Public Accounts Committee. We have two representatives who usually go from this committee to that. Last year the CCPAC conference was in New Brunswick, and we didn't have any members attending there because we had decided to put the majority of the attendees on the COGEL conference in San Francisco. Then the election writ was dropped, there weren't any committees, so members weren't able to attend. So we had a large amount of money set aside for that trip, and it wasn't utilized.

The Chair: If I could just interject at this point. Just for the information of the committee, when we get information on those conferences, we do distribute it to the members. Then you can indicate your interest, whether or not it's one that you would like to attend. Normally, but not always, we sometimes have more than we have positions, but sometimes it works out. We try to kind of alternate the opportunities.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Oh, the only other thing, Madam Chair: it increased last year, but it will be new for the members here. Under other labour and services we have \$19,000, and that's for the audit of the Auditor General's office that this committee is responsible for. It has gone up by approximately \$2,500 in the last year and a half. It increased, which isn't bad. We haven't any other increases on it other than that. So that's the only other really big budget item.

12:05

The Chair: Are there any other questions? Comments? All those in favour of that motion?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Are there any opposed? Okay. That motion is carried.

At this time I'd like to welcome Brian Fjeldheim, Chief Electoral Officer. Brian, before I ask you to introduce the staff, I know that the committee clerk has notified you to try to keep a presentation somewhere in the lines of 15, 20 minutes, and that will give us lots of opportunity to ask questions. So if you want to introduce your staff before you give a presentation, that would be great.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Thank you very much, and thank you again for the opportunity to meet with everyone here again today. I'm accompanied by Bill Sage, this gentleman here, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer; Lori McKee-Jeske, director of election operations; and Glen Resler, the gentleman at the far end, director of registration and finance. They're going to assist me today with this presentation.

Again, it's a pleasure to meet with you following our brief meeting on March 7. To begin a working relationship for the years ahead, I'm going to give an overview of our office at this first meeting. Hopefully, this will frame the budget proposal that we've prepared.

Our office is small. Originally intended for a staff complement of 14, we currently have 10 staff members including the Chief Electoral Officer's contract position. Our 10th person, an IT specialist, was

added just last year to manage increased automation in the register of electors and election management areas. We run a very lean operation when compared with other electoral jurisdictions across the country that have a similar mandate. I say this with a great deal of pride because our operation has changed dramatically in the 20 years I've been with the office. I feel that it's quite an accomplishment to do this with the modest staff complement we have.

You folks might not be aware that we administer two main pieces of legislation: the Election Act, of course, and also the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Requirements of that legislation keep us very busy between events, providing direction to candidates and their agents, parties, and constituency associations, ensuring timely filing and disclosure of financial statements, and so on.

Under that legislation I trust and hope that both you who are here today and your colleagues in your caucuses have filed your election financial statements. It is due on March 22, next Tuesday, and the penalty for not filing is the loss of the seat in the Legislature. So it's very serious. Please make sure that you and your colleagues have filed. There's no decision-making there; it's in legislation.

The Chair: Do we need to take a five-minute break?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Disclosure of financial statements will change later this year as we enhance public access through web-based availability of public information.

A quick review of our budget. We'll review that we have managed to sharpen our pencils and reduce our budget forecast by 85 per cent over last year.

Mr. Strang: How much?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Eighty-five per cent. Thanks. I was waiting for someone.

Read another way, the comparison may just highlight that our funding needs are obviously cyclical in nature. I can't claim any magic that will reduce spending from \$14.6 million to \$2.4 million this year. Obviously, it's a reflection of our duties and the job that we do.

We always budget for three by-elections and three targeted enumerations each year. This model was adopted after 1992, when three by-elections occurred. I've been asked in the past to try to provide a more accurate forecast rather than tying up funds and turning them back at the end of the year. Unfortunately, this isn't possible. We have to budget – and we do – for a worst-case scenario.

In terms of process it's interesting to note that many other election offices across the country don't go through this budgeting process. They receive statutory funding to finance legislated operations. I value our process because it provides an excellent opportunity for us to assess our performance and to obtain your views on the value of the services that we provide and to target future priorities. This process ensures accountability for the taxpayers' dollars that we've spent – and I don't have to tell you how important that is – and I can tell you that having to justify each expenditure helps to ensure that a definite cost benefit is apparent before we commit to spending, whether on staffing, administration, IT, or what have you.

This process also ensures that we're in step with the will of the Assembly in fulfilling our mandate. For example, there's been a great deal of debate on the topic of declining voter turnout. This last election saw the lowest turnout on record, 44.7 per cent. This is in spite of the fact that voters had more choices in terms of the number of candidates than ever before. We had 450 candidates this last election.

We do not interpret that our legislation nor our mandate directs us to attempt to increase voter turnout. Many of our colleagues and other election offices disagree on this point and spend millions of dollars to develop advertising campaigns geared to getting out the vote. Our budgets don't allow for this type of expenditure, and our advertising is limited to that prescribed by legislation. At the same time, I don't think our role is to sit idly by and watch voter turnouts fall. I feel that our job is to put out the buffet and then to ensure that people know how, when, and where to access it. We have certainly expanded the ways in which information is provided, by Internet, e-mail, and so on.

So there are my comments on our environment and our general philosophy. Now I'll explain where the \$14 million that was forecasted was directed. It was an extremely challenging year. I've always had the highest regard for my staff – these and the other people in the office, obviously – but as I look back, I'm still amazed by the achievements.

Returning officers for most of the province had been appointed by late 2003. Their first task was to redraw polling subdivision maps following the recommendations of the '02-03 Electoral Boundaries Commission and the Assembly's May 2003 acceptance of the new electoral division boundaries. Returning officers received training from our office and then created the 5,400-plus polling subdivision boundaries that serve as the building blocks for the enumeration and the election process.

They were also responsible for reviewing and adjusting the lists of electors created on those new polling division boundaries using data from our permanent central database, the register of electors. In urban areas they reviewed every address that had been incorporated into the register as we moved from an elector-based register to an address-based register. In Alberta there are about one million addresses that we now have in this database. This is an important distinction to ensure thorough coverage by enumerations and to help predict voter populations by area.

Fees, resources like timely address data, and IT services account for a large portion of the redistribution budget expenditure. So our fiscal year began with finalizing this redistribution project and providing political parties with maps and lists of electors that you received in April '04 on the boundaries that would take effect when the election was called. Those maps were put to almost immediate use.

Returning officers were contacted in May regarding their enumeration management training scheduled for June. We trained the returning officers in June, about 5,500 enumerators in August, to prepare for visits to each residence in the province between August 28 and September 12. Enumerators had prepopulated forms they went out with for all known addresses in the urban areas as we moved to an address-based register. Records contained elector data where available. Enumerators in rural areas were asked to collect legal land descriptions to facilitate assignment of electors to polling subdivisions as the boundaries changed, a task that had been very difficult during the mapping years.

Updating the register with a door-to-door enumeration is very, very labour intensive. Seventy-three per cent of the funding approved by this committee for the enumeration was directed to fees. A shift to more automated methods of updating elector information would have this redirected to hardware, software, and IT staff in the future. We're working to acquire the raw data necessary to update the list on an ongoing basis. The appropriate legislative framework is already in place to allow us to pursue this opportunity.

I mention a possible shift to automated updates since that is the growing trend within the election community. This is in response to the difficulty of reaching people at home and the difficulty of getting

into some residences, gated communities, secure multi-unit residential dwellings, and so on.

12:15

It also reflects the concern that enumerators may be at risk during the course of their duties. I can tell you that throughout the entire enumeration period I was scared, scared something was going to happen to somebody. We were lucky: a few dog bites and two occasions in which the police had to be called because of aggressive elector behaviour. Amazing. I was very relieved when the 5,500-plus enumerators finished their work without any serious preventable injury. I hope this was due in part to the work-alone policy we had instituted and the increased attention this topic received in our training programs.

As I mentioned, I was scared someone would be hurt. I want to mention this to you. The recent tragedy in Alberta last week gave me cold shiver when I saw in the newspapers that enumerators were visitors to the farm where that tragedy occurred. During the enumeration I received a call from the returning officer informing me that a rural road had been booby-trapped. The enumerator's vehicle went up the road to the farm. They turned around when they saw the no trespassing signs. On the way back to the main road all four tires were ruined on their vehicle because the road had been booby-trapped. Very frightening, very frightening. I tell you this to let you know that we have to look at a means of collecting elector data other than enumeration door to door.

Changes to part 2 of the Election Act dealing with register and lists of electors as well as the enumeration process were passed in May '04 and were in effect for the enumeration. One change allowed for telephone contact in rural areas, and this helped. It made the enumerator's job that much easier.

Another opportunity emerged during this period. We were advised in August of the possibility that we would be conducting a Senate nominee election in conjunction with the general election. This was a first for us and required a great deal of preparation even though the infrastructure, that's the returning officers and the polling places and so on, was already there to be used for the general election. We designed about 30 forms specific to the Senate nominee election and reviewed all forms containing the election forms regulation as well. Once that was finalized, we began ordering the large volume of forms needed to conduct the elections.

You may recall that the proclamation issued under the Senatorial Selection Act allowed prospective candidates to begin collecting nominators' signatures in September, so our involvement began at that time. Preparation for the election was a huge task that was accomplished in a very short time frame. Most people think it was very straightforward, and that's the whole idea. It's supposed to appear that way. You simply provide a second ballot on polling day.

In effect, I'd like to stress that we were running two elections on the same day – two separate sets of forms, rules, processes for counting, and so on. We were very pleased that we were able to manage the event with existing staff and well within the projected budget. Returning officers' election training began in mid-October, and that training accounts for the majority of the costs shown in the travel and hosting budgets. All training resources are developed in-house, and the training is done by our staff. Returning officers and their assistants, the election clerks, got two days of training.

For the first time, in the '04 election training featured one additional concurrent training day for administrative assistants, so we ended up having three people partially full-time in the returning officer's office. The returning officer could manage the use of the administrative assistants as they saw fit. That administrative

assistant was included in the '04-05 budget to help returning officers manage the increased automation and assist in the conduct of the special ballot poll. During our wrap-up sessions with returning officers, when we do a postmortem on the election and how things went, we heard practically unanimously that the new position was vital to the effective election management. That staffing level, I'd like to mention, is still low compared to returning officers' offices in many other jurisdictions.

Revised lists of electors were made available to political parties in October 2004. I was very pleased with these lists for two reasons. We started knocking on doors August 28. By the middle of October we almost had 2 million people, just shy of 2 million, on a list of electors only six weeks after we started, an amazing accomplishment, and if you're interested, we can talk more of how we used the Internet and so on. Very impressive. I'm very pleased with that. The list proved to be 96.7 per cent accurate when compared to lists circulated in March 2005, so we're very pleased with the accuracy of the list. We compare that by taking the number of people the day after polling day, the number of people that were on the list, and that's where we get the 96.7 per cent.

One more initiative was the integration of the national register of electors' data into our list for Calgary-Buffalo, an area that had an unacceptably high no-contact rate. In downtown Calgary it's very difficult to get into a lot of those apartments, so we used the list the feds had, partially. Although Elections Canada was not able to provide us with updated elector data for the province following a June '04 general election, they kindly made data available for this one electoral division. It was a useful exercise as we move away from the traditional door-to-door enumerations. The viability of that move will be assessed when we do a comparison of our enumeration list, where we walked around, with the feds', which will tell us what gains we made during our enumeration. We can then weigh those gains against the cost and risk associated with an enumeration.

We spent a fair bit of time and a limited amount of money to beef up the election information we provide to political parties and the public. We contacted all political parties and offered to participate in their campaign colleges to provide information on the rules surrounding the election process. I believe that if you're going to play the game, you should know the rules, and I was most pleased to have our offer accepted by five political parties.

We provided a number of informational brochures for the first time advising target groups – postsecondary students, armed forces personnel, trade union members, and people working away from home – of the availability of a special mail-in ballot and advising facility operators of mobile home poll administration and so on. These inexpensive resources helped distribute useful information as did the new web-based resources used during the election. We had about half a million hits on our website during the election. That's proving to be very beneficial.

The Alberta register of electors system is an enumeration and election management system built here in Alberta and used for the first time in 2000. Funds allocated to this project have allowed us to offer key information to electors on a timely basis, to support linkages between our site and political parties, and to assist electors in information acquisition and to increase efficiencies and administrative efficiencies also throughout the province.

Functionality has increased substantially for this event and, of course, we're improving on that system all the time. You may be interested to know that the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have adopted this system as well. Prince Edward Island used it in developing their new system, and Saskatchewan and New Brunswick are currently reviewing it. I'm very proud of that as well.

Expenditures in IT always seem high, but compared to similar

projects in other jurisdictions, we believe we received an incredible bang for our buck. You may recall that during our past election, electors could key in a residential address or a legal land description and discover key details on their polling place, voting options, and candidate information. This service was available in addition to information provided by our voter information call-in centre that we had, which offered extended evening and weekend hours of operation.

The election process allowed our team to really demonstrate the creativity valued in our organization. Forms, guides, and training resources were done in-house and printed, many of these changes necessitated by the renumbering of the Election Act in January 2002 and subsequent legislation changes in August '04. As mentioned, forms and guides to support the Senate nominee election were created in the same manner.

In response to concerns raised in the '01 election, we retained two ex-RCMP members to act as multi-unit residential liaisons in Edmonton and Calgary in situations where campaign access was difficult. Their involvement and the candidate identification we provided were two factors that appear to have facilitated candidates' access to these residential buildings.

Computers were acquired from Alberta Restructuring and Government Efficiency's computers for schools program. This allowed us to provide 200 computers to returning officers across the province at no cost, to save us about \$110,000 over the previous election.

A new position appeared to serve electors at the polls on polling day. For the first time a registration officer was used. Those people who were not on the list could go to this individual and be put on the list. This new position added a staffing cost of approximately \$226,000.

Increasing fees. You may recall that since '04-05, fee increases follow those in the Alberta public service, and approximately 72 per cent of the total election allocation is paid to the 14,000-plus Albertans who staff the polls on polling day. We saw large increases in the cost of advertising, returning office rental fees, and telecommunication service, all areas which we have little control over. An increase in polling place fees had a significant impact on the budget, \$194,000 over the previous election, obviously a necessary expense. This year's budget recognized the need for additional temporary staff as we conclude postelection activities. The increase in the technology services area reflects the need for data acquisition and establishing processes to update the registry with that data.

12:25

Before we move to review the budget figures, I'd like to invite you all, obviously at your convenience, to please come and visit our office to meet the staff, have a look at our operations, see where your files are recorded, where you're registered, and where your financial statements are placed.

I'm sure you heard concerns expressed during the last election, allegations of voter fraud, contravention of the act, and so on, most of which resulted from individuals' unfamiliarity with electoral law. We received about 50 e-mail complaints and about 10 letters. I'm pleased with that as well. We, of course, address all of those concerns and respond to them appropriately. In many cases individuals didn't agree with the processes in place and because of that opinion felt the law must have been broken or the process mismanaged. We do our best to explain the situation to these folks, and in most cases that's sufficient.

And now for the budget or any questions you might have. Thank you.

The Chair: Ivan.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Brian, I guess just a couple of points I wanted to bring up on your accuracy. Your 3.3 per cent must have been in West Yellowhead because my home wasn't even enumerated. It was funny: when I went in to vote, I couldn't vote because I had to get sworn in. I missed quite a few of them in Hinton too, so I just wondered.

The other thing is when you guys are drawing these lines, I mean, I guess it's all right when you sit in your ivory tower, but when you split a street, it makes it really awkward when you're trying to, you know, get as much time, especially in rural Alberta. I guess it's okay if you're in the city, but in rural Alberta when you've got one polling station and then you have to go to another polling station, it was confusing for quite a few people too. So I'm just wondering if we're looking at those. I'm not really complaining; I'm just trying to bring in different things. There were quite a few people that were missed and didn't understand.

I guess the other issue: in Grande Cache everybody's there with box numbers, so I wasted a lot of money when I sent everybody out with street addresses, you know, telling them to vote and where to vote. They all came back to me in a bundle, and so I wasted all that money because they're all post office boxes in Grande Cache. Addresses, yes, where their home is, but when they receive their mail, it's all post office boxes.

Thank you.

Mr. Fjeldheim: If I may respond.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Fjeldheim: First of all – and I'm not being defensive; I want to make that very clear – we train returning officers to review the polling subdivisions in the electoral division they are responsible for. You are a hundred per cent correct that in my ivory tower I do not have a clue on how I would subdivide Hinton, for example. I don't know Hinton. Obviously, I've been through it and so on. That is the responsibility of the local returning officer, and we ensure that that returning officer has the maps and all the credentials necessary to do that appropriately. We pay the returning officer a fee to do that, to review the maps, and they should have gone out. I don't know if your returning officer did or not, but we checked as best we can. They should have gone out and driven around every community in that electoral division to ensure that those things you mentioned do not happen. Nothing is worse than having people drive by a poll to get to another poll.

Your not being on the list, that's not a good thing. They are sent out with records that have the names of the people who were on that list previously. I'm quite surprised, actually, that . . .

Mr. Strang: Well, they missed the whole block. They missed the whole block on that street. Mind you, they were built a year ago last December.

Mr. Fjeldheim: No. It doesn't matter when they were built. When that information comes back – again, it's my responsibility; let's get that straight. I'm responsible for all of that. Having said that, returning officers are supposed to review those sheets when they come back to make sure that nothing is missed and that it's ticked off on the map to ensure that they did walk down that street and that you were included.

The box numbers. I might have to get some help on that one. In that area, Lori, would we have collected both the address and the box number? Do you know?

Ms McKee-Jeske: In that area we would recommend – I’m not familiar with Grande Cache, it was specifically. I’m not, sorry, familiar with the size of the area, but normally it would be recommended that both be collected.

Mr. Strang: Yeah. It was just the addresses, and they don’t use addresses in Grande Cache. It’s all box numbers.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Right. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.
Denis.

Mr. Ducharme: Thanks, Chair. Thank you very much for the update and for the partial explanation of the budget. I’ve got a couple of questions that I’d like to place in regard to the budget. You do make reference that you do set up for three by-elections. I was wondering if you could tell me what you estimated as the cost of each by-election.

The other comment that I bring forward is the increase in the budget, nearly half a million dollars more than, let’s say, the budget that had been placed in 2003-2004. It’s probably the budget to compare with last year’s because of the provincial election. I bring this comment back to the comments that I had delivered to each of the leg. offices back when we did the budgeting process for 2004-2005. What was happening is that we were seeing a pattern that was coming forward where a lot of dollars were being returned to general revenue. I believe I had made the comment at that time, and maybe fortunately for me and unfortunately for you, well, I’m back on this committee again.

The concern from the members on the Leg. Offices Committee was that we were hoping to have a more accurate type of budgeting process coming forth in the future, where we’re not going back and giving half a million dollars back. That’s why I asked the question on the costs of a by-election because that may answer the concerns that I have. I would be hoping that you’ll be able to tell me that you’ve got a fairly tight budgeting process in place now and that there isn’t going to be a major return to the general revenue fund because that seems to be a concern for some of my colleagues that don’t have the opportunity of sitting on this committee. They’re seeing that there have been huge increases every year in each of the leg. offices’ budgets and are questioning how accurate the budgeting process is.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes. I remember specifically, in fact, where I was standing when you mentioned that. We were right out here, and you asked if we could do that.

We certainly feel that we have a very, very competent budgeting process and system that we use to come up with these numbers. Having said that – I refer again to my comments during my preamble – in budgeting for those three by-elections, I see no other alternative to that. I believe that we have to do that. I know it’s the worst-case scenario – I believe it is, anyway – that we have experienced in this province, so that is why we do that.

In terms of the other, I believe that we are budgeting as accurately and as closely to the actual dollar as we can.

I’m going to ask Glen to comment on the rest of your question, please.

Mr. Resler: With regard to the actual dollars budgeted for the target enumeration and by-elections, it’s just under \$500,000. There is quite a variation if it ends up being a rural by-election versus an urban one. Specifically, advertising is the biggest cost, where you’re

looking at, you know, the comparison: a rural election is around \$7,000 in advertising; urban you’re looking at \$25,000. So you have vast differences in the different ones. So we take current information – I believe Red Deer and Wainwright were the last couple of by-elections – we use those figures, and we also increase them to the actual amounts that were expended during the last election. So we’ll take urban/rural, blend it, do an average, and bump up advertising a little bit just to accommodate in case there are two urban ones.

12:35

Mr. Lougheed: Thanks for your comments respecting the reduction in the budget and the work you’ve done there in reducing it 80 per cent. Ivan was particularly wanting to advance that cause. I would also like to thank you for the good weather during the past election. The first couple of days were pretty cold for door-knocking, but after that we enjoyed a really good time, so whatever connections you had there.

A couple of questions. With respect to funding the offices for the district returning officers, do you feel some constraints there? It is my understanding in my particular area that there are a couple of constraints: the availability of the space within the constituency, which was almost zero, and the second constraint was if one moved out of the constituency to the adjacent constituency where there was space available but at rather high expense. There was my understanding that your budget was tight and to have a perhaps more appropriate place at probably 10 times the cost, you know, very low cost to the market value in that area, was something that the expenditure was a little more than you could handle. Could you comment on that part first?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes. Across the province this election was by far the most difficult in finding office space. It seems like unless it’s a long-term commitment, landlords are just not even interested in renting, and the cost doesn’t seem to matter. In one case in Calgary we had an individual: \$10,000 for six weeks. We said: oh, oh, that’s too high. So Bill talked to the landlord and played the democracy card, and we got it for \$8,000 and were fortunate.

We had this time, the first time ever, two returning officers in Calgary outside their electoral divisions sharing an accommodation. Again, when you talk about budgeting, it’s difficult to budget for that, so we certainly try to keep a lid on it. Availability is very difficult. Again, we’ve never been outside the electoral division before, and I really don’t like to do that. Really, our backs were against the wall. Similarly, out in the Sherwood Park and Strathcona constituencies: very difficult to get space. So, again, we advise returning officers to attempt to get the most economical space available, and when it gets down to the 11th and 12th hour, we have to sometimes spend more money than we really want to; I won’t deny that.

Mr. Lougheed: The second question was with respect to the act itself. We had some conversations during the election campaign and subsequent to it.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes.

Mr. Lougheed: With respect to the act, will you be bringing some suggestions forward at all or making comments in any particular way about the act?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yeah. Postelection, as I mentioned, we do a postmortem with the returning officers and with individuals, parties, candidates, official agents who contact us regarding suggestions not

only on the Election Act but on the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Yes, we do a review of that, and we'll be bringing that forward in the appropriate manner.

Mr. Flaherty: Brian, just two things. I'd like to express to you that your staff in St. Albert were excellent. I was a rookie running, and I found them very helpful to our office and very objective, and I want to compliment them on that.

In terms of your staffing, the community services board in St. Albert has an insurance policy for members on the board. I'm thinking in terms of these people that go out and risk their necks. Do you have such a thing? How do you compensate people, for example, that have damage to their car or lose their tires or their health?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Well, in that case the returning officer contacted me, and I said: well, yes, we'll certainly have to compensate for those tires. They obviously would not have been there if they had not been carrying out the duties that we had assigned to them, so I felt that we had a responsibility to do that.

In terms of insurance and health for the rest of these people, yes, they are covered. Glen, I'll let you comment further on the insurance coverage.

Mr. Resler: We have our coverage through risk management. Upon their advice we've also purchased additional coverage for accidental death and dismemberment. So they are fully covered. And you have your usual WCB coverage if they did injure themselves.

The Chair: Any other . . .

Mr. Strang: Maybe just one quick one, if I could, just sort of a compliment on the aspect of the amount of mail-in ballots and how cordial your staff was because at the time, you know, we had a lot of snowbirds too. They were very good and worked with the people. So I just want to make sure that we don't lose sight of that because that's a very good thing for people. We're such a mobile society, and you know, like you were saying with the low turnout, I think it would have been a lot lower if your people weren't so diligent in the area. It worked really well through the whole region because, as you realized in 2001, we had quite a swift switch in population where they'd work somewhere but their home was still in the riding. It worked out very well for the people, so I want to compliment you and your people for doing that.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Well, thank you very much. I agree with you that the mail-in ballot – and I don't know if Lori has the numbers here or not – is becoming increasingly popular. Of course, depending on when the election is called, you're quite right: not only those people working in the northern parts of Alberta generally can take advantage of that opportunity and get the mail-in ballot but also the people who are outside the country.

So thank you; yes, it is a good system. The returning officers and election clerks and the administrative assistants deserve the credit for that.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, comments?

Dr. Pannu: Just a comment not specifically on the budget. In your introductory remarks you made a reference to the fact that your office does not invest any resources in ensuring higher turnouts during elections, unlike your counterparts in other provinces, I

suppose, and also federally. Given that voter turnouts in the province have been dropping over the last 15 years, at least, you know, a consistent drop every time we return to the polls, are there any concerns that you have or any advice you have to give to us and to the Legislature on this?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Well, I'm not sure advice is the right word; maybe some thoughts I have on it because we do discuss this with colleagues across the country. Again, you've seen perhaps during the federal election the advertising that is done by Elections Canada for people to get out and vote and so on.

We do invest resources. I wouldn't say that we do not invest resources because by legislation, of course, we put those maps out; we make sure that everyone is aware of where to vote and how to vote and the options of the advance poll and the special ballot and so on. It is not in my job description nor is it in the legislation that so much money be set aside to put together television ads or newspaper ads and so on.

Quite frankly, I believe that my job is to administer the Election Act. Please, don't take this the wrong way. I think your job is to get the people out to vote. That's my philosophy on this. I manage it, I can run it, but again I think that it's up to the candidates and the political parties and so on to get the people out to vote.

Dr. Pannu: With respect to other provinces on this issue where, I guess, election commissioners and election commissions do advertise on the TV, as you said, I wonder if their turnout rates have also been dropping like ours and whether or not that advertising on the TV makes a difference in getting people out to the polling stations.

12:45

Mr. Fjeldheim: First of all, yes, their voter turnout has dropped. The argument you could make is that, well, it would have dropped further if we hadn't done any advertising. They have put together in the province of Ontario some very effective ads. They have people in a restaurant, and then someone else is ordering for them. They're very catchy and all the rest of it, but they spend a lot of money doing that sort of thing. Obviously, that's their business. But, again, they still are suffering a voter drop.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Well, thank you so much. We're going to deal with our motions regarding the budgets when we've heard from all of the officers, so that will be on Thursday.

So if we can move forward to 4 in our meeting binder, actually 4, tab B, the supplementary estimate. For those that were not in attendance last week, we passed a motion to deal with the supplementary estimate request put forward by the office of the Chief Electoral Officer prior to the election, and that was dealing with all of the costs of the senatorial election. Just to remind everybody of the motion that we passed last week, it was moved by Mr. Ducharme 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 Chief Electoral Officer's request for supplementary estimate has now been revised to reflect the actual dollars utilized out of the approved \$2.88 million accountable advance, and it's recommended by Alberta Finance that the committee's motion be revised to coincide with the supplementary estimate as tabled by Finance on March 8. So Karen has provided me with a draft motion, which I'll

read to you for our consideration. It's quite lengthy, but it does appear to address the amount of the accountable advance, the amount of the actual supplementary estimate, and the balance or lapsed amount.

So I would like to invite the following motion, if someone could move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request by the Chief Electoral Officer for supplementary funding in the amount of \$1,018,000 required to defray the cost of the November 22, 2004, senatorial election and that the amount of \$1,862,000, representing the balance of a \$2.88 million accountable advance issued under Treasury Board directive 06/2004, be lapsed and that this motion replace the March 7, 2005, motion by Mr. Ducharme approving a supplementary estimate of \$2.88 million.

Would someone be willing to make that motion?

Mr. Ducharme: I move.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion on that? All those in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? The motion is carried. Thank you very much.

Is there any other business right now for the committee to discuss? If not, we are scheduled tomorrow, same time, 11:45.

An Hon. Member: Should we leave our binders here?

The Chair: Oh, that's right. If you'd like to just leave your binders here, we'll redistribute them tomorrow at the start of the meeting.

So if I could have a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Rodney: I'll do that.

The Chair: Perfect. All those in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Motion carried.

Thank you very much, and we'll see you tomorrow.

[The committee adjourned at 12:49 p.m.]

