

Title: Wednesday, October 12, 2005 Legislative Offices Committee

Date: 05/10/12

Time: 10:05 a.m.

[Mrs. Tarchuk in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to welcome the members as well as our Chief Electoral Officer to this meeting and ask that everyone introduce themselves for the record. We'll start with you, Laurie.

[The following members introduced themselves: Ms Blakeman, Mr. Ducharme, Mr. Lougheed, Mr. Magnus, Mr. Marz, Dr. Pannu, Mr. Rodney, and Mrs. Tarchuk]

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

[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: Great. Thank you very much.

I'll just mention that the meeting packages were delivered to members last Thursday, October 6. Under tab 2 you have a copy of today's agenda. I wonder if someone would move that the agenda be accepted as circulated.

Ms Blakeman: I'll move that.

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

If you move to tab 3, you can see that there are a number of minutes that we have to approve. We'll go through those one at a time. If you go to 3(a), I wonder if someone would move that we adopt the minutes of the March 7, 2005, meeting.

Mr. Marz: I'll move that.

The Chair: All those in favour? The motion is carried.

Item 3(b). Could someone move that we adopt the minutes from March 14, 2005? Dave. All those in favour? That motion is carried.

Would someone move that the minutes of March 15, 2005, be adopted? Richard Magnus. For that particular one I understand that the mover was not in attendance.

Mr. Magnus: You're right. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Moved by Raj. All those in favour? That motion is carried.

The minutes of March 17. Would someone move that those minutes be approved?

Mr. Ducharme: So moved.

The Chair: Denis. All those in favour? That motion is carried.

March 22, 2005. Could someone move that we adopt those minutes? Rob. All those in favour? That motion is carried.

Lastly, the minutes of May 2, 2005: could someone move?

Ms Blakeman: I was there; I can do that one.

The Chair: Laurie. Thank you very much. All those in favour? That motion is carried.

Once again, welcome to Brian and his staff. They're going to provide us with a verbal overview of the statute amendments that his office is working on. At this time I'll pass it over to you, Brian.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Good. Thank you very much. Once again, good morning and thanks for this opportunity to meet with everyone again. Everyone has introduced themselves, and I think you all know Glen, Bill, and Lori. As those who are veterans on this committee also know, I have to have lots of people with me because I need all the help I can get. That's not a surprise to anyone, I don't think. Well, I guess it's not.

Again, three topics I plan to present today, all of which have long-term implications for our office. I'd like to begin by discussing the possibility of an ex gratia payment relative to the judicial recount following the 2004 provincial general election. I'd like to also discuss briefly the review process relative to the two pieces of legislation, the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, that we administer and, finally, the expiration of my appointment on November 22.

You may recall that in the 2004 general election the Liberal candidate in Edmonton-Castle Downs had a narrow margin of victory on election night. It was five votes when ballots were tallied at the unofficial count at the close of polls on polling day. During the official count, conducted by the returning officer following the same process used in all the 83 electoral divisions, the winning candidate's margin of victory was reduced to three votes.

That decision was appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench, and that was upheld, which upheld the returning officer's decision and the three vote margin of victory, following a judicial recount even though it ruled differently on some of the ballots than the returning officer had. So those two were the same.

There was a subsequent appeal to the Court of Appeal, and that reversed the outcome of the three previous counts. The Progressive Conservative candidate, who had been a close second, was then declared elected.

Application was made to the Court of Appeal for costs. The judgment is brief. I think you have copies of it. I'll just highlight that briefly. That was Thomas Lukaszuk and Chris Kibermanis, the respondent, and Elizabeth Burk, the returning officer, who just did an excellent job throughout this entire process, and Valerie Lauzon, her election clerk. The court's decision was that based on the written submissions, they "have no option but to order that each party bear [its] own costs."

Their second point is that "the Crown takes the position that, in the absence of any express statutory authority for the courts to order costs in provincial elections, no such order can be made against the Crown." It goes on to say:

Under the Local Authorities Election Act . . . costs may be ordered against a municipality . . . But it points out there is no similar legislation [under the Election Act] for provincial elections authorizing a court to order that costs be paid by either the Crown or the Chief Electoral Officer.

Under 3 they looked at other jurisdictions, and in those jurisdictions "there is express statutory authority to impose such costs." There is not in Alberta, and they accept that.

Under 5 the court says, "We strongly recommend that the Legislative Assembly consider adopting costs legislation in recount cases such as this, similar to that in effect under The Local Authorities Election Act."

Under 6 they say, "Allowing a reviewing court the discretion to order that costs be paid by the public in an appropriate case serves to protect that public interest."

Finally, the seventh point they raise is that "although we have ordered that each party pay [its] own costs, it of course remains open

to the Crown to make an ex gratia payment to cover the reasonable costs or some portion thereof of both candidates on this appeal.” So although the application was denied, again it remains open for the Crown to make an ex gratia payment.

Following the judgment a letter was sent to the Minister of Justice pursuing the possibility of an ex gratia payment. The response to that letter came in the memo from the chair of Treasury Board – I believe you have that in your packages – which states in part that Treasury Board “authorized ex gratia payments” to reimburse the parties for “reasonable legal costs.”

It’s important to recognize that the payment does not imply any error was made by the returning officer or the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. In fact, it’s a credit to the performance of the returning officer, as I mentioned before, who did an excellent job, and the administration of legislation given the close scrutiny of activities in this case.

I would appreciate a recommendation from the committee to make this ex gratia payment in accordance with the memo from Treasury Board. This was not an item for which we had budgeted, obviously, but we can make funds available from within our current budget, and it will come from the contract service funding area.

In addition, I would suggest that the reimbursement of legal costs in this circumstance may be something to address in legislation during our review of the Election Act.

I would like some direction now from the committee.

The Chair: We’ve got that later on in our agenda. If you want to proceed with your overview, we’ll get back to that recommendation.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Oh. All right.

10:15

The Chair: Is it the wish of the committee that we deal with the recommendation right now? It makes no difference to me. Okay. Let’s do that.

We’ve got two members who would like to exclude themselves just in the case of their having a conflict.

Mr. Magnus: We’re on Treasury Board.

The Chair: We’re okay for a quorum.

You’ve heard the history as set out by the Chief Electoral Officer. I wonder if somebody would be interested in making the motion that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommend that the office of the Chief Electoral Officer make ex gratia payments not exceeding \$160,000 in total for the legal costs incurred by Mr. Lukaszuk and Mr. Kibermanis related to the recount for the Edmonton-Castle Downs riding following the November 22, 2004, provincial general election, the payment amounts to be based on the review by Alberta Justice.

Raj. Are there any questions or discussion on that? All those in favour? That motion is carried.

Okay. Did you want to go back to your review then?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Thank you. Will those gentlemen be rejoining us?

Mr. Ducharme: Yeah. I’ll get them.

Ms Blakeman: Could I just ask: are you going to walk through the legislative changes that you’re contemplating or recommending?

Mr. Fjeldheim: No, not today.

Ms Blakeman: Oh. Okay. Then could I ask a question? When is the expected review of the two different acts? Is there a sunset clause or a drop-dead date or some point when it’s supposed to be done by?

Mr. Fjeldheim: No, there isn’t. If I go through this, then, hopefully it will clarify what I hope to get done today because of the magnitude of the changes involved.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Just go ahead.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Okay. The second issue I wish to present for your consideration is the process for review of the two pieces of legislation we administer, the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. I’ll preface my comments by saying that I appreciate the commitment of this committee via the chair to entertain a legislative review. Proposed legislative amendments have in the past been presented by the Minister of Justice or by a subcommittee of this committee, struck for the purpose of legislative review.

A number of issues have emerged in other jurisdictions, some of which may – may – represent emerging trends. I feel it would be valuable to assess some of these initiatives within the context of a comprehensive legislative review. This will be a detailed and time-consuming task, that, in my opinion, may best be handled by a smaller group that would report back to this committee. In my experience that is how it was done in the past. Obviously, it is up to this committee to decide how you want to handle that. In my opinion that is the best. I recognize that you are busy people and may prefer a summary produced in follow-up to a detailed review. Simply put, the time today is not sufficient to provide you with the necessary background to allow for meaningful discussion within this group.

We are also observing the public hearings currently being held to gather a recommendation for change to the Local Authorities Election Act. One recommendation of the June 2005 Clark inspection report suggested that commonality in municipal and provincial elections could reduce voter confusion and increase participation. This idea has been expressed at some of the hearings and we feel is something that should be integrated into our review.

Our postelection analysis of the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act resulted in some 125 items for review. Some, like clarification of definitions, would simply facilitate administration, while others, like replacing newspaper advertising during an election with voter cards, represent a real change in the way elections are administered in this province.

I believe it would be presumptuous of me to recommend sweeping legislative amendments in areas that represent a fundamental change to the way we do business and suggest that the members of this committee would more appropriately institute change of that scope. We have a working document in our office listing these recommendations, which are meaningful only with a thorough background, briefing, and discussion.

New initiatives in other jurisdictions may provide a useful framework to the discussion. We would certainly be happy to provide that.

I do not feel that it’s within the purview of the Chief Electoral Officer to propose legislative changes of this scope but would appreciate the opportunity to offer an overview of electoral activities

across the country and detailed information on points of interest that the committee may wish to pursue. I would appreciate the direction of the committee in clarifying this review process to allow the time and attention to the detail required.

Ms Blakeman: What is the timeline that's being considered?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Well, I feel, certainly, that it would be appropriate to have this done within six months.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So you're not trying to have it done before the 22nd of November?

Mr. Fjeldheim: No.

Ms Blakeman: Six months. Okay.

Mr. Fjeldheim: This is a large and involved process that requires a great deal of study and understanding.

Once again, today, if I may, what I am looking for is the recommendation of this committee on how you would like to handle this. Do you want to meet with the entire committee? Do you want to establish a subcommittee, which was done previously? Obviously, that is your decision. I just want to sort of assist you in understanding the magnitude of this and the time that will be involved.

Mr. Ducharme: Brian, in your opening remarks you made a reference that it was a format similar to that which you're proposing that occurred in the past. Could you elaborate a little bit more as to how the composition was then?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yeah. If I recall – I have to look at the bill here – I believe it was a three-person committee that was established. They reviewed the proposals and questions and so on and met with the members of the chief electoral office staff and went through the entire process. It was that group, then, that reported back to this committee as a whole.

Mr. Ducharme: My next question would be: was it the minister responsible for your legislation that set up that committee, or was it a committee set up from this group here?

Mr. Fjeldheim: It was a committee set up from this group. If I recall correctly, the chair asked who would be interested in being involved in the committee, and it was sort of, "Yeah. I'd be interested in that." Then they put their name forward, and I think it was through consensus that the subcommittee was established: who would be interested in being on that subcommittee.

Mr. Ducharme: So it had nothing to do with the minister responsible for the legislation.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Not in that case. No.

The Chair: Any idea when that was, Brian?

Mr. Fjeldheim: In '94, '95. Roy Brassard was on the committee. The chair of the committee was . . .

An Hon. Member: From southern Alberta.

Mr. Magnus: Barry McFarland?

Mr. Fjeldheim: No.

Mr. Lougheed: Ron Hierath.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yes. Ron Hierath chaired the committee. We can supply Karen with the *Hansard* of that if you'd like.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Oh, I can find it.

The Chair: Why don't we do that? We'll take a look at what the process has been, and then we can poll our own members and see how we'd like to proceed with that.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Certainly. Good. Any other questions regarding that?

10:25

Ms Blakeman: Is there some urgency to this? If it's a six-month process, do you see a need to commence that process immediately? Or could this research be commenced and done over, for example, the summer recess? Is there immediacy in needing to do this review?

Mr. Fjeldheim: I would hope that it would get done sooner rather than later. We have most of the information now that's required, unless the members or anyone on the committee, obviously, have any other thoughts that they would like us to take a look at.

I always think it's a good idea to have any election legislation in place about two years before we think the next election might be so that we have a chance to get used to it and to train the people involved and so that people have an opportunity to become aware of the legislative changes. So it doesn't hit just a short time or months before the election, I'd like to have it in place sooner rather than later.

Mr. Magnus: Brian, when I'm going through these recommendations, it talks about an annual review of salaries. Who annually reviews these salaries? Anybody? Or is this your suggestion as a recommendation?

The Chair: It's actually a different review, Richard. We don't have any documentation from Brian.

Mr. Magnus: Oh, okay. So there is no annual review of the legislative officers then?

The Chair: Actually, there is. Yeah.

Mr. Fjeldheim: I would just say on that that I would like that backdated as far as possible.

Mr. Magnus: To '94?

The Chair: That last committee. The next committee can look at that.

Okay. Are there any other questions for Brian?

Brian, did you have anything else?

Mr. Fjeldheim: One more item.

Dr. Pannu: You said that there's a working paper available in your office with respect to the kind of legislative changes that might be

needed. Is that paper available to us, or could it be made available to members of the committee?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Well, I don't think it's really any secret. Obviously, everyone is going to get a look at everything. Perhaps if it was done in some structured manner rather than one member's got it and another doesn't or whatever – I think it would be better if we handled it sort of globally.

Dr. Pannu: So the answer is that, yes, it is available.

Mr. Fjeldheim: The answer is yes, but I would suggest that we establish a process to do it so that we're all on the same page. Do you follow me on that?

Dr. Pannu: Process meaning a smaller committee at first.

Mr. Fjeldheim: That's what I would recommend.

Dr. Pannu: Okay.

Mr. Marz: If we were to establish a subcommittee to look into this – and I think I would favour that process – that decision would have to be made in a meeting, I would assume. The makeup of that committee could then be established through the chair outside the committee. Each party may want to have a discussion of who they want on the committee from here because there are more on the committee than just one member of each party; aren't there?

Ms Blakeman: Well, the membership on this committee is based on the number of seats, and there's a formula that's used from there.

The Chair: I think Denis wants to comment on this.

Mr. Ducharme: Yes, if I may. I believe that before we move ahead to that, we should basically get our background on it. There's a minister that's responsible for this legislation. We as a committee can maybe come forward with all kinds of recommendations, but if the minister isn't willing to bring forward our report, et cetera, regarding the changes to these acts – I think it's essential that we have discussions with the minister responsible for these acts before we move ahead a little bit too fast on this.

Mr. Marz: Well, I recognize that the minister can reject or accept any recommendations from this committee. However, I still think that it's the committee's responsibility to react to an official request.

Mr. Ducharme: You see, the last piece of legislation I had to do changes with was the Ombudsman Act. Before the last Ombudsman left, he basically had brought forward some recommendations, and they were brought forward to the minister, and the legislative changes came about. I don't know; I imagine the format would probably be similar in terms of the minister deciding to set up a committee. In that case of the Ombudsman Act I think I had been requested to act as liaison with the Ombudsman and to work with the ministry in terms of the necessary changes to the act.

The Chair: Why don't we just accept this recommendation today and give ourselves time to take a look at what has happened in the past and come back and make a suggestion to the committee that we can discuss at a later date?

Dr. Pannu: I just want to reinforce what Richard has just said. This committee is a committee of the Legislature and has its own responsibilities. Surely we're welcome to work closely with the

minister responsible, who might want to bring forward legislation. But these are two separate issues. This committee has its own work to do, and we need to ask: what's the best way to get that work done? The substance of what we recommend is what might have concern to the minister, but that comes later.

The Chair: Any other comments or questions for Brian?

Okay. Well, in our tab 4(c) we do have a copy of Brian's letter. As he has said, the Chief Electoral Officer's contract expires one year after the polling day for the last general election, which, of course, we all know was November 22, 2004. Brian has advised that he does not wish to be considered for reappointment. So, Brian, on behalf of our committee please accept our appreciation for a job well done during your term. We've enjoyed a very positive experience with you, an open experience, and we wish you every success with your future endeavours.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Thank you. Thank you.

Well, you've stolen some of my thunder now. I was going to say that the third issue is the expiration of my employment contract. It expires on November 22. Tough decision. Tough decision. I'll miss the people I worked with throughout the public service and the challenges that we had. Great job. Now, I know that we all agree that I've done an excellent job. [interjection] Well, maybe not. It says: pause for applause; limit, 10 minutes. Anyway, as I said, you stole my thunder.

A lot has been accomplished in the key areas targeted seven years ago, and I can assure you that there are eight very committed and talented people in our office, certainly including these three. As I mentioned – and I wasn't kidding – I need all the help I can get, and it's just been excellent.

There are still a number of initiatives that are under way. We just discussed one of them, of course. Please keep in mind that some of these initiatives take several years. Data acquisition, that register of electors: that's a big job. Our colleagues in other jurisdictions who led the way are still working on it. So are we as we work towards that perfect made-in-Alberta solution. Another long-term review – and I mentioned the magnitude of it – were those legislative amendments.

It's always tough to leave a job that's undone, and this is one of those jobs where there's always something new and something more that can be done. Still, knowing that that expertise and experience to continue is in the office certainly makes it easier for me to make a very difficult decision. I have complete confidence in the ability of the staff in the office to move forward in the work that's been left in progress with the right leadership in place. Our succession planning highlighted the many strengths in the office and certainly gave me the assurance that the future challenges will be met appropriately.

In closing, I want to thank each member of this committee – thank you – and the members of the previous committees. It's really been a pleasure working with people. Hopefully, we've managed to make this thing work well. I believe we have. I appreciate the support that you've given me and also the support received from the people of this province. I'm very grateful that I was able to serve as Chief Electoral Officer.

Thank you.

10:35

The Chair: Thank you very much. I understand that you'll be joining the other officers soon for a presentation and lunch. So at this point we'll just take a one-minute break, and you'll be able to join them in the foyer.

Mrs. Sawchuk: They should be here soon, in five or 10 minutes.

The Chair: As far as the committee, before we start a discussion on the review of the salaries of the officers of the Legislative Assembly, I wonder if someone could move that we go in camera.

Mr. Marz: I would so move.

The Chair: All those in favour? Any opposed?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, me. Can that be noted, please, by voice?

The Chair: That is noted.
Motion passed.

[The committee met in camera from 10:36 a.m. to 10:49 a.m.]

The Chair: What I'd like to do at this point is go around the table so we can record everyone that is here for this portion of the meeting. So we'll maybe start with you, Laurie.

[The following members introduced themselves: Ms Blakeman, Mr. Ducharme, Mr. Loughheed, Mr. Magnus, Mr. Marz, Dr. Pannu, Mr. Rodney, Mr. Strang, and Mrs. Tarchuk]

Mr. Button: Good morning. Gord Button, Ombudsman for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

Mr. Hamilton: Don Hamilton, Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Brian Fjeldheim, Chief Electoral Officer.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee I welcome all of you.

Before we have a presentation on the review of salaries for the officers, I wonder if we could have a motion to move in camera. Dave. All those in favour?

Ms Blakeman: Is this necessary?

The Chair: Yes, it is, for the same reasons I mentioned earlier.

Ms Blakeman: Could you put those on the record, then, because I really think that this should be up for discussion.

The Chair: We will.
Okay. First, all those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Any opposed?

Some Hon. Members: Opposed.

The Chair: Okay. We can record that Laurie and Raj are opposed. Thank you. That motion is carried.

[The committee met in camera from 10:51 a.m. to 1:12 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. I wonder if somebody could move that the officers of the Legislative Assembly be authorized to receive an additional increase of 0.9 per cent calculated on their respective salaries at March 31, 2004, retroactive to April 1, 2004.

Mr. Strang: Madam Chairman, I'll make that motion that we proceed with that .09.

Some Hon. Members: No, no. Zero point nine.

The Chair: Zero point nine.

Mr. Strang: Zero point nine. I just wanted to see if you guys are paying attention here.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any discussion on that? Any questions, comments? All those in favour? Are there any opposed? Seeing none, that motion is passed.

Could we have a motion that the officers of the Legislature be authorized to receive an increase of 3 per cent retroactive to April 1, 2005, in keeping with the increase approved for senior officials by the government of Alberta for 2005-06.

Raj. Any comments or questions on that motion? All those in favour? Are there any opposed?

An Hon. Member: It's 4-4. It's a tie.

The Chair: Okay. The chair will be in favour of that motion, so that motion is passed.

Denis, you have a third motion?

Mr. Ducharme: Yes. Following the discussion that we had with the officers of the Legislative Assembly regarding salaries and benefits, I'd like to move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices undertake a comprehensive review of the scope of positions, responsibilities, salaries, and benefits of the officers of the Legislative Assembly and that a request for proposal be issued to independent human resource consultants inviting proposals to complete this review on behalf of the committee and that the submissions received be brought before the committee for review and selection of the successful proposal.

The Chair: Any comments, questions? All those in favour? Are there any opposed? Seeing none, that motion is passed.

Okay. If you move to tab 6 in your binders, I just want to advise that the current contract with Kingston Ross Pasnak, KRP, has expired with their completion of the 2004-05 audit of the office of the Auditor General. KRP has confirmed that they would be prepared to continue as the auditor of the office of the Auditor General.

I know that Denis had participated in an exit interview with both the AG and KRP, and maybe, Denis, I'll ask you to comment on that meeting.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Chair. Following the end of the spring session, on behalf of the chair of this committee I was asked to meet with the auditing firm of the Auditor General and the Auditor General and his senior staff to discuss the audit report that was done on our behalf by Kingston Ross Pasnak. This was the second occasion that I've had to do this. I had the opportunity of doing it the year previously. I can share back to the committee that the Auditor General's audit came through with flying colours.

At that opportunity both the Auditor General and myself made the auditing firm aware that their contract to this committee was expiring. The Auditor General had indicated that one of the proposals that could possibly happen is the fact that we could go for a request for proposals to get a new auditing firm. I felt in a way, from listening to the comments, that the Auditor General was very,

very happy with the work of this firm, that has been providing this service for I believe – what? – the past five years. One route is to go that way.

Another route is that there aren't going to be a lot of people knocking on our doorstep in terms of wanting to be the auditing firm because by being the auditing firm of the Auditor General's office, it limits them as to the work they can do for government. They can't be hired because it's going to be a conflict.

In that light, when I had the opportunity to be alone with the gentleman from the firm, I said: "You know, if there's an interest for you to want to continue to be the auditor, you should at least forward an indication of that. The committee will have to make a decision ultimately, but if you're still interested, maybe there could be an opportunity for extending this contract, this term of contractor services that you're doing."

Since that time, they have submitted a letter to the chairperson – I believe you've got a copy in your package – indicating that they would be willing to continue in this role as the auditor for the Auditor General's office. So I just share that with you.

In that light, since I attended the meeting, I would be prepared to make a motion, Madam Chairman, that

the contract for the firm of Kingston Ross Pasnak as the financial statement auditor for the office of the Auditor General be extended for a three-year period beginning with the audit for the 2005-06 fiscal year and terminating after the completion of the audit for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The Chair: Any questions or comments?

Dr. Pannu: You mentioned that there probably won't be many firms lining up to put in a proposal for this appointment because it limits what other business they can do with the government. Do we have any information on what happened last time around? I think they were appointed five years ago. Did we have a problem with attracting more than one or two or three proposals or offers?

Mrs. Sawchuk: We had two firms, Madam Chair, that responded, that put in a proposal in response to the letter of invitation that went out. I think there were nine or 10 that were contacted directly, and one of them was Kingston Ross Pasnak. I think there was only one that wasn't successful.

1:20

The Chair: Any other comments? All those in favour of that motion? Any opposed? Seeing none, that motion passes.

Okay. Moving on to Other Business, there isn't any business arising.

Regarding the date of the next meeting, I know that Karen had asked people if they would be able to bring their calendars. The committee needs to review the 2006-07 budget submissions by the officers, and we're anticipating that the final numbers will have to be submitted to the Budget Bureau by the second week of January 2006, which is usual. We haven't had that date confirmed yet, but we can expect that.

We might want to poll the committee and take a look at the week of December 12, assuming that we may be finished session by then. We could look at a day where we would start budget reviews at 8:30 or 9, do what we've done in the past. Last year was an unusual year, but before that we spent the entire day looking at 45-, 60-minute intervals and then having a Christmas luncheon with our officers. So I was going to throw out that week to start with and see if we could come up with a possibility for a day to do that review.

Mr. Ducharme: That one is good with me.

Dr. Pannu: Madam Chair, my plans are not absolutely final yet, but I may not be around those two weeks around that time, December 12.

Ms Blakeman: What if we moved it to the end of the week before that?

Dr. Pannu: No. We're not here.

Ms Blakeman: We're not here?

Dr. Pannu: I'm not here. I'm at a conference: COGEL.

Mr. Marz: Would it be possible to have it while we're in session? You know, some morning?

The Chair: The problem that we had last year is that's what we did. We split up all of the . . .

An Hon. Member: Too difficult.

The Chair: Yeah. We did it over lunches, and we had some difficulty trying to schedule that. We had different people for different reviews, and it was very tedious. If we can find a day. Then the other thing, too, is that you have the opportunity to sit down and have the Christmas lunch with your officers, which we couldn't do when we did it in that sporadic approach last time.

Mr. Ducharme: How about the week of the 19th, 20th or the earlier part of the week after? I don't know if Raj will be back.

Dr. Pannu: No.

The Chair: Raj, are you saying that you're gone that entire week, the 12th to the 16th?

Mr. Ducharme: You'd be back the week of the 19th?

Dr. Pannu: I may not be. I'm planning to proceed to India from there, you know, from Boston.

The Chair: And when do you come back?

Dr. Pannu: I haven't . . .

The Chair: Well, then you might be gone for this period anyways if we're trying to do it before Christmas.

Dr. Pannu: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Are you willing to let us meet without you being here?

Dr. Pannu: Yeah. Sure.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Pannu: If you get any budgets, Madam Chair, before that, I'll look at them.

The Chair: And pass on comment. That would be great.

What if we looked at Tuesday, December 13? Does that look like that's a possible day to plan?

Mr. Marz: What time? At 10 o'clock?

Ms Blakeman: At 9.

The Chair: Let's say 9:30, just to compromise, in case it's a travel day for anybody.

Mr. Marz: At 9:30?

The Chair: That's it. December 13 at 9:30.

Ms Blakeman: To what? From 9:30 to 3?

Mr. Ducharme: Give yourself till 5.

The Chair: Well, I'd say either 3:30 or 4.

Some Hon. Members: Four.

The Chair: Four.

Okay. Could I have a motion that we adjourn the meeting?

Ms Blakeman: Wait. Right now, since we're so good at booking things and we're on a streak, why can't we make a tentative date to review the RFP?

Mr. Magnus: We don't know when we're going to get them back.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Richard, you wouldn't believe how hard it is to get this committee together.

The Chair: Well, it is difficult, and that's why I would suggest: let us do the preliminary work, and it could be that we're able to tie it in to that same day. It might be. Let us determine first if that could be the case.

Mr. Ducharme: Or when we're in session maybe.

Ms Blakeman: Session's always tough for us because we have a different schedule than you do.

Mr. Rodney: What do you think of that, Laurie? If it is December 13, we could take care of that.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yeah.

The Chair: Well, we'll just see. Right now we don't know what we're talking about, so we couldn't really go ahead and pick out dates.

I'm sorry. There was a bit of a battle there as to who wanted to adjourn, Richard or Raj. Is one of you willing? Richard. All those in favour? Okay. Everyone have a safe trip home.

[The committee adjourned at 1:25 p.m.]

