



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Tuesday, January 23, 2024
1:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-5

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC), Chair
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair

Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)*
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)**
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)

* substitution for David Shepherd

** substitution for Scott Sinclair

Also in Attendance

Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)

Legislative Officers

Kevin Brezinski	Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner
Diane McLeod	Information and Privacy Commissioner
Terri Pelton	Child and Youth Advocate
Glen Resler	Chief Electoral Officer
Marguerite Trussler, KC	Ethics Commissioner
W. Doug Wylie	Auditor General

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Christina Williamson	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Shannon Parke	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, January 23, 2024

[Mr. Getson in the chair]

The Chair: We would like to call the meeting to order. I'd like to welcome all the members, staff, and guests to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

I'm Shane Getson, the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, chair of the committee. I'd like to ask all those members that are joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then we'll go to those that are joining us remotely online. So to my right.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Lundy: Brandon Lundy, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont.

Member Eremenko: Janet Eremenko, Calgary-Currie.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Ms Chapman: Amanda Chapman, Calgary-Beddington.

Mr. Bhurgri: Abdul Aziz Bhurgri, research officer.

Mr. Koenig: Good afternoon. I'm Trafton Koenig with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Ms Robert: Good afternoon. I'm Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Ms Rempel: Good afternoon. Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

The Chair: Perfect. We do have substitutions today. For the record I'd like to note the following substitutions: Mr. Lundy is substituting for Mr. Sinclair, and Mr. Ellingson is substituting for Mr. Shepherd.

With that, we'll just go to the online folks, playing musical squares on the screen, I see. I see MLA Dyck first. If you want to introduce yourself.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you very much, Chair. MLA Dyck for Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Just below him I see MLA Ellingson. If you want to introduce yourself, sir. Oh, you're just on mute, sir.

Mr. Ellingson: Apologies. MLA Ellingson, Calgary-Foothills.

The Chair: I don't think that's ever going to get old after the COVID years. Everyone has that line at at least one meeting.

MLA van Dijken, you're up next. Same comment as the last gentleman?

Mr. van Dijken: I thought I had it already. MLA Glenn van Dijken from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. Sorry.

The Chair: No worries.

I see MLA Johnson just below you on the screen here.

Mrs. Johnson: MLA Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

The Chair: I do see the name for MLA Long. If you want to turn on your video so we can see as well and make sure everything is working.

Mr. Long: MLA Long, the MLA for West Yellowhead.

The Chair: Excellent. And showing off that rural Internet service well; we had a bit of a sound delay with the video. Thank you very much, everybody.

A few housekeeping items before we proceed. Your microphones: you don't have to touch them. *Hansard* is taking care of that for us. Committee proceedings are being broadcast and live streamed on the Internet on Alberta Assembly TV. Members participating remotely should ensure they're prepared to speak – we got through the speaker mute buttons there – and videoconference participants are encouraged to have their cameras on, if possible, when speaking. Please ensure your cellphones and all of the devices are set to silent for the remainder of the meeting.

I'd like to draw everyone's attention to the draft agenda. Would anyone like to propose any amendments or move a motion to approve the agenda?

Mr. Hunter: I move the motion.

The Chair: I recognize MLA Hunter to approve the agenda. Okay. Have we thrown it on the screen? There we go. Seeing the motion on the screen, any discussion?

Grant, I guess you have to read it out loud for us.

Mr. Hunter: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its January 23, 2024, meeting.

The Chair: All right. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Any opposed? None. Going to the video teleconference/technology, all those in favour? Any opposed? Motion carried. We have ourselves an agenda.

We also have two sets of minutes for consideration today. Each document will need to be dealt with separately.

December 14: let's begin with those. Would anyone like to propose amendments or move a motion to approve the December 14 minutes?

Mr. Lundy: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on December 14, 2023.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion on that?

All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? On the line, all those in favour? Any opposed? Motion carried.

All right. Same thing except for the following day, December 15. We have minutes from that as well. Would anyone like to propose any amendments or to move the motion to approve the December 15 minutes? MLA Eremenko.

Member Eremenko: Sure. Moved by Janet Eremenko that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on December 15, 2023.

The Chair: Perfect. Assuming there's no discussion, all those in favour? Any opposed? On the phones? Any opposed? Motion carried.

All right. Now officers of the Legislature: decision on officers' '24-25 budget submissions. We had a research request. When we met in December, this committee made a decision regarding the budgets and the submissions of the Ombudsman, the Public Interest Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It was also determined that more information was needed on the committee to make the decisions on the budgets for the remaining four offices: specifically, the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Child and Youth Advocate, and the Ethics Commissioner.

The committee requested a crossjurisdictional scan comparing operational budgets for statutory officers in other Canadian jurisdictions. This document, which belongs to the committee, was distributed last week. Before we proceed any further on this information that will be used by the committee in assessing their budget requests, I would ask the committee members if there are any objections to providing a courtesy copy of this document to the officers of the Legislature. Any concerns? No? Okay. Thank you. I'll have the committee clerk, please, distribute the document as directed by the committee.

At this point I'd like to turn the floor over to – and if I mess up your last name, I apologize in advance – I want to say Mr. Bhurgri. Did I get it right?

Mr. Bhurgri: Bhurgri. Yeah.

The Chair: I couldn't get Eremenko's right for about three meetings. I got yours pretty close out of the shot. I'm getting better here, maybe, in the new year. With that, to provide us an overview of the document, sir, please proceed.

Mr. Bhurgri: Thank you very much, Chair. What I'm going to do in this brief presentation is just give an overview to the committee of the crossjurisdictional document that we prepared. I do want to state at the outset that I will not be going in detail into the contents of the document. What I will instead be doing is explaining to the committee how we approached the crossjurisdictional, what processes we identified, and, ultimately, what conclusion we reached.

Research services was tasked with identifying comparable jurisdictions for the four offices: the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Child and Youth Advocate. There are four jurisdictions that we identified. These four jurisdictions were British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia. We identified these jurisdictions by looking at three primary factors. These were population, the number of elected members, and we looked at the financial resources, or in this case the GDP, that's available.

As a matter of rule of thumb, we excluded all jurisdictions that had less than a million of population, and we also excluded all jurisdictions – in this case, two – that had a population over two times that of Alberta. We did make an exception for the office of the Auditor General. We did compare Ontario and Quebec for the office, and we did that because we thought that the office – the volume of work as well as the nature of the office – was similar enough that we thought it would be beneficial to include those jurisdictions.

The second part that I want to talk about is the specific methodology that we employed, and I'll clarify what I mean by that. What I mean is that on the considerations that we looked at, the factors that we looked at in sort of identifying what data we will extract to provide the committee as much contextual information as we can for the operational budgets, the way we did that was that there were three factors we identified. These were mandates, duties, and the size of the office. We identified these three because the mandate of an office is generally largely reflective of the role of the officer. If the mandate is larger, that can impact the amount of duties there are, and that can similarly impact the size of an office. So what we wanted to do was cover these.

1:40

There are some other factors that also impact operational budgets that we have not considered in this, and I'll explain shortly as to why and what those factors may be. But these are the factors that we looked at. If you look at the structure, we have four parts, and

those four parts are the four statutory offices. Within that, we have similarly followed the same format in each of those sections, which is that we have looked at the overall mandate, we have looked at duties – where they are relevant, where they are different – and we have also looked at the size of those offices.

We were also sent two crossjurisdictional surveys by two of the statutory officers. One of them was sent to us by the Ethics Commissioner, and the other was sent to us by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, both of which we have attached in this crossjurisdictional review.

Now that I've explained the process of how we conducted the crossjurisdictional as well as our approach to it, I want to talk a little bit about the conclusion that we at research services eventually reached, which is that we found this crossjurisdictional review to be incredibly challenging. We did not think it was a one-to-one review, and there are a few reasons as to why we have reached that conclusion, and I'll briefly state them for the committee here.

The first reason for that is that there are other factors that we did not consider or could not consider that also impact operational budgets. Now, these three factors – and I'll mention them again: mandates, duties, and sizes – are largely reflective of how an operational budget may be allocated or utilized. But there are other factors. Some of them, for example, could be the amount of employee salary increases that happen provincially. Inflation is another example. An officer can specifically be required to travel; they may be required to outsource some work. These are factors that we did not look at, but these are factors that do impact operational budgets.

The second reason that we found this crossjurisdictional to be complex is that we did not always find consistently similar information available for all offices. It is because each jurisdiction can give information differently. The release of public information available: that can be different. So that's the first trouble that we had. Second is that even when we did find information, we have generally found it difficult to make or draw any direct inferences because of the amount of variances that exist between these offices. Again, we have identified and talked about all of them in the crossjurisdictional, but I can briefly give the committee a few examples as to specifically what I mean.

If you look at the office of the Ethics Commissioner, the mandate that exists in Alberta seems to be significantly different than the mandates that are available in other offices. An example is that Alberta seems to be the only jurisdiction that has senior designated staff as well as political staff that have to give financial disclosure. This does not seem to be a requirement for any of the other jurisdictions. Now, because that requirement exists, that does mean that the role of the statutory officer, in this case the Ethics Commissioner, can similarly vary because the mandate is so different. Another example that comes to my mind is the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. In Alberta there is one specific service that we provide, which is providing legal service to children and youth, that takes a significant amount of budget of the statutory office. No other jurisdiction seems to do that.

Outside of the variances, where we found similarities, we did compare them. Again, I can state an example for the committee. For the Chief Electoral Officer we did find British Columbia to be a close comparator because of the population, because of the number of members elected, and we did try and compare these two offices. However, even when we did find similar information, there were certain variances that we pointed at, and I can, again, give the example of the Chief Electoral Officer. If you look at the budget that British Columbia has for next year's election, it's significantly higher than the budget that Alberta had. In their report the Chief Electoral Officer states the new technologies that they're trying, that mail costs have gotten higher. These are just some examples to

say that even when there are similarities, there are enough variances for the committee to take into account.

Overall, we have tried to compare operational budgets and give the committee as much contextual information as possible, but we have not found this, again, to be an easy comparator, which is why in the crossjurisdictional review we advise the committee to exercise caution in drawing any definitive inferences.

I believe that is it for my part. If there are any questions, I'm more than happy to take them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect. Well, again, on behalf of the committee, not to speak for them, I think I can thank you for doing all this work in short order and for what you did pull together in that timeline. Very much appreciated. So thank you for that hard work and effort, and please pass that along to any other team members that you have there as well.

With that, we'll throw it out to questions from the committee members. I'm keeping a speaking list, so just throw your hand up, absolutely.

Member Eremenko: Thank you for the presentation, and lovely to have you here today. Just right off the top, do you have a rough estimate of the hours of work that were used to complete this study and the number of FTE equivalents that you might be able to provide to us?

Mr. Bhurgri: I'm sorry. Could you repeat your question? I just want to be clear about what exactly you're asking about.

Member Eremenko: Sure. I'm wondering about the resources required to provide this crossjurisdictional study both in terms of time and FTE equivalents.

Mr. Bhurgri: Yeah. I don't think we have an account for that. Nancy can maybe elaborate on that.

The Chair: Sure. If you wish, Ms Robert.

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms Eremenko, it's not something that we – like, we don't sort of track what would be billable hours. You know what I mean? When research services is given a task, there are two members of the research services team plus the director of House services, who is the supervisor, and depending on how much work there is, they just divvy it up and they just get it done. So we don't necessarily track the number of hours.

Member Eremenko: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions? Boy, you guys are letting everybody off awfully easy today. This is good.

Okay. Moving on, then, we do have some outstanding budget decisions. If there are no more questions, you can stay with us, I believe, research, or you can choose to leave. It's up to you. It's really exciting. But we really appreciate it, again, on that.

So with the requested research that we had, now we need to make some decisions here, folks, because we're getting close.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move that we allow the committee to consider a motion to approve the office of the Auditor General budget estimates as revised.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Renaud: As revised?

Ms Chapman: As revised?

The Chair: Yeah. There have been no revisions on record. Are you asking something different? Are you asking for revisions to come from the floor? Is that what you're . . .

Mr. Hunter: Which will come from the floor.

The Chair: Okay. So let me get through this. In the first place here, we have to make decisions today, folks. We need to get this on to Treasury Board and Finance. With any of the deliberations or conversations the intent of the chair is to make sure that we get this done today. So that's the first one.

The second part. If I understand what your intent is, MLA Hunter, it's to move a motion from the floor, similar to what we went through before with 52.041, to allow substantive amendments to motions to come from the floor. Is that correct?

Mr. Hunter: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Renaud: I have a procedural question.

The Chair: Sure. Go ahead.

Ms Renaud: Okay. When you're going to sort of entertain motions, I'm just wondering why automatically you're going to Member Hunter. Like, we weren't given the opportunity to speak up or anything.

The Chair: A great question. I was reading through my notes, getting on to the next section. He caught my eye because he threw his hand up, similar to you and your colleague throwing your hands up there. I am keeping a speaking list – I kind of said that part – but that's literally what it came down to.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

The Chair: Is that what you're asking, then, MLA Hunter, back to that?

Mr. Hunter: Well, Mr. Chair, I remember the last time we had to move a motion to be able to receive revisions before we could actually move to the actual motion. Is that correct? It's still a little fuzzy in my mind. I'm just trying to understand the process. If I got the wording incorrect, then I apologize. But just help step me through it. If Ms Robert can help me understand that.

The Chair: Sure. So we'll go through the process. Ms Robert will jump in where the chair may or may not be out of line here. Typically with motions you have to table them a couple of days in advance of the committee meeting. If you're making any substantive changes to any motions that have been tabled without notice, then the committee has to hear a motion from the floor to accept motions for substantive changes to go to the floor. If that is indeed the case and it is the will of the committee by majority, then that procedure starts to take place, and then you can make amendments to motions that had already been tabled in advance.

1:50

Mr. Hunter: Just for a point of clarity, Mr. Chair, what I stated there was to allow the committee to consider a motion to approve the office of the Auditor General budget estimate as revised. I don't know: is it revised? Is that what's knocking you off . . .

The Chair: Yeah. Just walking through this, folks – and everyone's patience is really appreciated – if you're revising an amendment that was already tabled, that has been posted and where everyone has had a chance to see it, then we need to allow those types of motions to come

from the floor. That would be considered substantive – that is what I’ve learned from last time – and that needs to have the will of the committee first.

Ms Robert, if you want to just clarify.

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Basically, I’ll try to clarify it. Basically, the way it works is this. For the most part, any substantive motion that a committee member is going to move needs to have been put on notice as long as the chair has issued a letter under Standing Order 52.041 saying that you have to do that. The chair did that, so that rule is in place.

Now, there are some exceptions. There is an item on the agenda called approval of officer budgets. If there is a motion to just approve the budgets as presented, that wouldn’t need to be put on notice. The Legislative Assembly Office, in order to assist members, posts those standard motions, and they’re posted on the internal website. So if a member just wanted to move that motion in support of that agenda item, that’s fine. You can just go ahead and do that.

However, if a member wishes to move a motion that’s a different motion – it’s an altered number or an altered motion – notice needs to be provided for that. If notice is not provided for that, the member needs to seek the permission of the committee to allow the motion to be moved. If a majority of members vote to allow the motion to be moved, the motion can be moved. If a majority of members does not, the motion cannot be moved. Does that make sense?

The Chair: Yeah. What she said.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, through you to Ms Robert, is my wording incorrect, then, in this? The motion that I have on the table is basically what you’ve said there. Is that correct, then? Do I need to change the wording of this? This is what I’m asking.

The Chair: Where I would go with this, MLA Hunter, is that I wanted to make sure that we were crystal clear on intent. Our clerk has put something up on the board. I think that that’s where your intent was. Then we got through the questions and conversations. If that’s indeed what you’re looking for, just read that into the record, and then we can carry on with the discussion on your motion.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices consider an amended total for the proposed budget submission for the office of the Auditor General.

The Chair: Perfect.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, just for clarity, will we use this if we want to do that from now on?

The Chair: It would have to be done for every time that you’re changing what is already sitting as a preregistered motion, that’s already been submitted in advance. Like, if you want to amend a sitting motion, then, yes, this would have to take place on every one.

Ms Chapman: I just want to make sure I’m on the speakers list for when we’re talking about this motion.

The Chair: Yeah. This is what we’re talking about now. That’s the current business, and you want on the speakers list for that?

Ms Chapman: Yes, to speak to this motion. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks for your patience, guys.

Okay. With that, is there any discussion? I apologize. Now I’m just thinking of your darn cat. MLA Chapman.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Chair. Yeah. I mean, I guess I’m not surprised that this is what’s happening because this is what happened in the last committee meeting. We went through this song and dance. I just want some clarification on the point of having the rules about submitting motions in advance when I feel like committee members aren’t being respectful of that. I guess I’m wondering if the member can provide, you know, his rationale for why he wasn’t able to presubmit this motion for the deadline, which would have been Friday past, I think.

The Chair: I guess I’ll address the first item. We’re still playing within the rules. The rules are rules. I can’t presuppose what some of the members’ intents are, leveraging which rules at which given time.

With that, I would turn it back to MLA Hunter if he wishes to entertain the question on why you put this forward.

Mr. Hunter: I don’t think that there’s anything out of order in this. There is a standing order, 52.041, that specifically states that I’m allowed to do this, as all members are. I’m not sure if that’s considered as doing anything out of order. If I am out of order, then the member has the full potential to be able to say: “Point of order, Mr. Chair. Can you rule on this?” If she’s saying that this is a point of order, she can go through that process, but at this point she knows full well that Standing Order 52.041 allows me to be able to do this, as it allows all members of this committee to do this.

The Chair: I don’t think that there was a question on a point of order. I didn’t hear a point of order being called.

Ms Chapman: No, no, no. Just for clarification on why. You know, we receive these notices asking us for motions to be presubmitted, so I guess I’m just not clear on: why do we even do that? Why are we even pretending there – right? – if all the motions are just going to come from the floor?

The Chair: It’s a good question as we get our feet wet in the session. I would suppose – and, again, I’m guessing, without trying to put words in other members’ mouths – that if, as an example, you had seen something that you didn’t agree with on what was proposed and you had an amendment, then you potentially could use this to adjust it. So I think there’s a reason why the rules are there. Maybe Ms Robert can comment on if it’s been used before or the intent of it, but from what I’m understanding here, being the new chair as well, it allows for anything that didn’t fit within those timelines, and again it’s up to the discretion – and it has to be the majority – of the committee to accept it. So there is always that. If the committee chooses not to accept these from the floor, then you carry on, and you either vote for or against those amendments that are already pretabled.

Any other questions on clarity for procedure or otherwise? Any other debate on the item, on the motion that’s on the floor?

Okay. I’ll call the question in the room, then. All those in favour of the motion that’s tabled, please say aye. Those opposed? Okay. On the phones, those in favour, please say aye. Okay. And those opposed? Okay. I believe the ayes have this motion.

Motion carried.

MLA Hunter, go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices amend the proposed budget submission for the office of the Auditor General for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the amount of \$31,065,000 to a revised amount of \$29,620,000.

Mr. Chair, can I give comment as to the reasons why I believe this is . . .

The Chair: Sure. Please go ahead.

Do we want to get it up on the board? Do you guys have enough? Okay.

We'll let you carry on, and we'll just circle back to make sure that what you had proposed is in good order once it's on the board. Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Hunter: Sure. Really, I'll just keep it very succinct, and that is that the number that we're looking at proposing basically just provides us with an opportunity to be able to keep those numbers at a frozen level because of the crossjurisdictional analysis that was done, that shows that, compared to Ontario and B.C., we have – well, actually, they made the crossjurisdictional analysis. The work that we went through was to be able to take a look at what the inflationary amount was over those years, and this is the reason why we've come up with this number.

The Chair: MLA Renaud, you caught my eye, and Eremenko next.

Ms Renaud: Certainly. I think that, well, some of my colleagues have brought this up before. We had the officials from the office of the Auditor General here. I think they were very clear with all of us in talking about the scope of the financial audits, the performance audits. I think that if you look on page 7 of the jurisdictional scan, you'll see very clearly in 2022-23 99 financial audits, 11 performance audits. You can imagine the amount of security and technology that is involved and the staffing. I mean, the vast majority of what is in this budget is human resources because this is really intense work. I was on the Public Accounts Committee for a number of years, and I've seen first-hand the in-depth audits and the year-end work that they do. It's just mind boggling that a member can sit here and randomly reduce a budget that was so carefully considered and that none of these questions came out when officials were here to answer. So it's just incredibly disrespectful and disappointing.

2:00

The Chair: MLA Eremenko, you were next and then followed by MLA Hunter.

Member Eremenko: Yeah. I think that in reference to the presentation that was provided by the research team at the outset of this meeting, that was letting this committee know, warning this committee to take the jurisdictional review with a great grain of salt, you know, the number of times that I circled in this report that talked about how difficult this was, how challenging it was, that this was not a one-to-one review, to fall back on what is not – that's not a result of flawed methodology; it's, frankly, a flawed question, asking for data that simply doesn't exist with the kind of turnaround time that this team was provided with. So I think that to fall back on this review, knowing the caution with which this committee was provided, is just a deeply misguided excuse for making these changes.

The report on Alberta's offices alone is incredibly revelatory to my colleague's point around just how much work these offices do to ensure the accountability and transparency of members and their political staff, and we'll certainly get to the Ethics Commissioner later on in this conversation. I'm stunned to think that this review would justify this kind of a reduction. I could not disagree more strongly.

Mr. Hunter: Just to give a little bit more clarity, for those who might be following online, this committee did say that it was in

favour of having the LAO staff and research do a crossjurisdictional analysis. The crossjurisdictional analysis showed that Alberta's Auditor General is \$7.26 million higher than British Columbia's and \$2.84 million higher than Ontario's and that, if I'm correct – obviously, B.C.'s and Ontario's populations are bigger than ours, the size of their government is larger than ours as well, so I think that it's important for those who might be listening to recognize that because we're going through an affordability crisis still in this province, all over North America, I think it's prudent, that this decision shows that Albertans know that we are trying to be careful with the taxpayers' dollars in this time of affordability and that we're doing our part to keep those expenses down.

The Chair: Okay. I have MLA Ellingson and then MLA Chapman, followed by Renaud.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. Being a stand-in for this committee [inaudible] that he had made that I'm not here for. Yeah, there was a very extensive crossjurisdictional analysis done, and, well, yes, Alberta does have a lower population than British Columbia. However, the office of the Auditor General, according to this report, performed three times the number of financial audits that they performed in British Columbia, and that might have something to do with why we have more staff and a higher budget. I, obviously, am not privy to, like, where all those financial audits are coming from. Presumably, this is important work. I guess I would ask the question, you know: do we know as we projected – and presumably the office of the Auditor General would understand whether or not the next year and the year after we expect the number of financial audits and performance audits to be consistent or to be increasing.

I think it's unjust to just do a population comparison when our research team has done a very extensive crossjurisdictional analysis and then we boil it back down to a 10-second, "Oh, B.C. has more people than us, and their budget is higher; therefore, we need to cut it back." That's not okay.

What I think is also not okay: it's pretty clear with the passage of Bill 5 that this government is not as concerned with the affordability crisis and keeping costs in line as they would say. So I think that if we're, you know, looking at some of those cost-of-living adjustments that salaries in the office of the Auditor General might be having, the question then is – if we're going to hold that budget or reduce that budget from what was put forward by the office of the Auditor General, then we're going to have to ask: do you know what staff they are going to cut, what time they are going to cut from their work, and what impact that is going to have on the audits that they perform?

I think that we should give very due consideration to the budget that the office of the Auditor General has put forward and due consideration to the crossjurisdictional analysis that our research team has done for us. Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect.

I have MLA Chapman, then followed by MLA Renaud.

Ms Chapman: Thank you. Some similar things to what MLA Ellingson said, but I really think it bears repeating. I really hear what the research team had said about the complications on doing this crossjurisdictional scan, but I also see that there is really specific information in this report that we can look to to help us make these decisions. As MLA Ellingson just said, you know, population aside, we can look at the work that's being done, right? And if we look at the work, we see that Alberta – this is for the year 2022-23 – performed 99 financial audits whereas in B.C. it was only 32, so, again, three times the workload. On performance audits, that's another figure where it's double, where here in Alberta we

did 11, and in B.C. they did six. So I think that we really can look at the work for some guideposts as to what the needs are for staffing.

I also know that the last time the committee met, we talked about, you know, those government-mandated increases in salaries that are affecting these offices, right? I think that we know as well that, of course, the vast majority of the budget for these offices is on staffing. No surprise. I don't think we have an AI yet who can do financial analysis, right? We're still using people to do that work, and those people need to be paid.

In general I just want to say, too, like, that this office that we're talking about, the office of the Auditor General: just to remind people on the committee – right? – they are the legislated auditors of every provincial ministry, most of our provincial agencies, boards, and commissions, and their job is to report on how the government is managing its responsibilities and the province's resources. So, yes, I do get a little bit concerned when government members of this committee suggest that, you know, this kind of an office should be seeing a budget reduction when what they're asking for in terms of their budget increase is completely in line with generally expected increases to their expenses.

Thanks.

The Chair: MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Yeah. I just wanted to bring up, you know, that we received a letter – actually, the chair received it on behalf of the committee – dated December 15, 2023, from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, the hon. Marguerite Trussler. I just wanted to say that I actually agreed with one of the lines in her letter that this is an unprecedented attack on the budgets of independent offices. I think it's really important for people listening or paying attention to this meeting that – that's the key – these are independent offices, and if you look at their requests for increases, they are justified. They are small. They're meaningful. They talk about why they need these additional funds.

I don't understand what the nickel and diming of these budgets is, other than to show off some kind of fiscal prowess that doesn't even make sense, when this is the same party that has no problem in four years with \$120 million for a war room, 7 and a half million to advertise an Alberta pension plan. Like, it just doesn't make sense that we're going to cut, shave off under \$2 million from the Auditor General's office when this office is so key for transparency and sunshine. Clearly, there is a desire to reduce that because that is what this will do, and it really is an unprecedented attack. It's beyond disappointing that Albertans have to be subjected to this. If anything, we should be bulking up transparency, not cutting.

Thank you.

2:10

The Chair: Perfect.

Members, we've gone around the horn a couple of times, with members speaking at least twice. Since Member Renaud did bring in a letter that was sent to the chair, it should be also noted that the chair sent a request back to the Ethics Commissioner to caution her tone and make sure that there was nothing untoward from the office coming to the committee. So I would caution members about dragging in other correspondence through the chair into a debate of what is germane right now because we have three other offices to get through. If that member really wishes to debate during the office of the Ethics Commissioner, of which the budget is still to come up, that might be a better place to have that dialogue.

Mr. Hunter: Just really quickly, Mr. Chair. Member Chapman said that this is a reduction. It's not a reduction. They will be kept the

same as they were in 2023-24, so I'm not sure how she says that it's a reduction. It's not.

You know, I don't want to cause lots of problems here, but I will say, in response to what Ms Renaud was saying, that they did actually have the opportunity to form government for four years. They added about \$65 billion of debt onto Albertans' backs, so I don't know if that's something that we should be talking about in terms of fiscal responsibility on that side.

The Chair: Okay, folks. I see where this may be going. If there's anything new to add to the debate without having too much water that's passed at another time or those conversations, if it's germane to the relevant debate, then I will entertain it. But also, folks, given the cognizance of time I'm – okay. I'll give one more note.

MLA Ellingson, I've seen you on the phone here, but I also have Chapman, who's waving her arm like she's really trying to get my attention. I'll leave it to you two to decide who arm wrestles and gets the last word. Are you letting the lady go first, or are you taking it, sir? Not to put any pressure on.

Mr. Ellingson: I'll allow MLA Chapman to go. She's in the room, and she sits on this committee. I'm a stand-in.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA, for chivalry still being alive.

Ms Chapman: I just really want to clarify. I'm sorry that I wasn't clear enough earlier for the member opposite, but what I meant to say was: what we are talking about is a reduction in the request, yes? A reduction in the request.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

With that, folks, we've had some really good, fulsome debate. I anticipate there will be more in the other ones as well, so we'll just keep our powder dry for those.

I'm prepared to call the question. As the motion is read and on the screen, all of those in favour? All of those opposed? Going to the phones, all of those in favour?

MLA Long, are you there?

Mr. Long: In favour.

The Chair: Okay. Never sure with these darn things.

That's all that are in favour on the line. All of those opposed online? Okay.

I believe the ayes have this motion by numbers.

It was close but went to that side. All right. Well, that one is closed and passed.

The next office that we had under consideration was the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. There was an agenda item that was tabled, or a motion was put to the floor.

MLA Chapman, you just caught my eye.

Ms Chapman: I'd like to move a motion. Is this the right time?

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Ms Chapman: I'd like to move the motion that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the proposed budget submission for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in the amount of \$11,588,000.

The Chair: Okay. You want to read that into the record, so the original motion is what you're looking to . . .

Ms Chapman: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's in the . . .

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. Perfect.

Perfect. Having heard the motion – oh, okay. There we go. Just go over that, MLA Chapman. Make sure that’s what you wanted.

Ms Chapman: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

With that, I’ll open it up for discussion.

Mr. Hunter: Chair, I’d like to move an amendment to the motion.

The Chair: I’m not sure how that works. Can we move an amendment to the motion when it’s in discussion?

Ms Robert: You’ll need consent to do it.

The Chair: Oh, yeah. You would need consent to move an amendment because it potentially could be substantive. I’m not to presuppose what you might be moving, but if it’s substantive, i.e. changing any dollar value, then we would have to go back through 52.041 again.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following amendment to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices consider an amended total for the proposed budget submission for the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Chair: Okay. We’ll look at the amendment now at this point. All right. What we’ll do here, just to make sure: we’ll have the MLA move his request for consent for the motion. Then procedurally the committee would have to vote on consent to allow an amendment from the floor. Then, if there were a subsequent amendment, which you alluded to, that would be read, and then we would go from there.

So if you just want to read that in, MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Yeah. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit an amendment to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041 with respect to the motion to approve the proposed budget submission for the CEO.

The Chair: Okay. Now, having heard that, I’ll open it up for discussion. MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Actually, no. I’ll withdraw that. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Eremenko.

Member Eremenko: I guess I’m just thinking about, you know, not necessarily breaking the rules but also operating in good faith. Yeah, we’re allowed to do all kinds of things. This is not the first but the second time today and – what is it now? – the fourth time that it’s happened in the conversations of this committee when it comes to the budgets and very likely is going to track for the rest of the meeting in regard to the remaining two offices to talk about. I feel it’s important to state that we are all here in good faith and bring as much goodwill to the new year as we can.

There are processes to help run efficiently, to be productive with everybody’s time here. Sure, we could go about it in a different way, but it bears mentioning that there is a way that we could do this that brings the kind of decorum and decency to this room and to these conversations that I think everybody deserves, particularly as we talk about the strains that households and workers are under and that this government is going to be under as we enter deliberations in six

weeks or a little bit more. We have got to be a little bit more efficient with our time. It may be allowed, but I don’t think it puts our best foot forward.

Thanks.

2:20

The Chair: Yeah. And I can say, for myself, that I agree. The more efficient way is to not step outside the lines, to keep that good faith, and to post these things in advance. Absolutely, I don’t think anyone from the table here would disagree with you. Again, being the chair, I’m kind of caught on that point where we still have to follow the rules, and if there’s something that’s different, then we have to do that. My honest hope is for this committee to run smoothly and efficiently, as you had stated. I think that’s the best way to keep doing business going forward notwithstanding current circumstances. As the chair I hope it’s not the will of the committee to keep exploring the boundaries of legislation and parameters and that we can go forward.

MLA Hunter, you had your hand up on this one as well.

Mr. Hunter: Waived.

The Chair: Okay. We’ll waive.
MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I just wanted to put on the record a reminder for anybody watching this meeting that it was just a few years ago that this UCP government actually eliminated an independent Election Commissioner. I think the idea at that point from numerous members – I mean, people can go back and check *Hansard* – was, you know: “We’re going to bulk up the elections office. Not to worry. Everything is in place.”

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, Member.

Ms Renaud: And now, as we go – I’m sorry.

The Chair: Member, I hesitate to interrupt, but we’re talking about the motion at hand, so the discussion is the motion at hand.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I will talk to the motion.

What we’re doing, once again, is undermining a process. We had the officials from this office before this committee. We were able to hear from them specifically on why this budget was built in the way that it was built. And the crossjurisdictional information: I think what my colleague said earlier is that you need to take it with a grain of salt. If you look at the data that was shared with us, there’s absolutely no reason to change this budget.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Ms Renaud: I’ll stop right there.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, we are actually on the amendment here. We’re talking about Standing Order 52.041.

The Chair: For consent, correct?

Mr. Hunter: For consent.

I have heard not one bit about that, talking specifically to this motion, so I would rule that that’s out of order. When we get to the point where we’re actually talking about what the member is talking about, I think that’s fully in order but not at this point.

The Chair: Yeah. Member, I'd ask that if you are calling a point of order, please point to the standing order.

The chair is going to rule on this one. To keep everything moving forward, I'm not going to call it a point of order at this time, but I will have a caution. I'm inclined to agree. Let's keep it to the motion being brought forward right now, asking for consent for a motion to be brought forward, and then we can get on the motion itself. Understanding that some very valid points have been made on timing, I would ask members to have caution with that, too. We've got two more or three more to get through here at this point.

MLA Ellingson, you have the floor, sir.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a quick question. I think that maybe the difference here is that in this case a motion had already come forward to approve that budget, and now we have the amendment using Standing Order 52.041. My question, then. I think what we're getting at here is that we also want to, like, amend the budget. Will that come up, then, in the conversation on MLA Chapman's motion?

The Chair: First, you need consent to allow an amendment to come on a motion that's already sitting, and that's normal, in due course. Like, if you had a posted motion, you could have a subsequent amendment made to that motion. That one gets debated, and then it is either voted approved or against, so no different than the House in this regard. We're still following practices. Fasten up your chinstraps. It's a little bit different than for most of us, so that's why I have the clerks here.

But a great question, sir. Right now what we're looking for, if debate has ended on it, is to allow consent, and given the timelines, I'm prepared to call the question. Does that make sense, sir?

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Good questions, guys, as we're going through this, and I appreciate everyone's decorum, honestly, to work through this. It's a little bit of a rough spot, obviously.

At this point we are looking for consent as per 52.041, as on the screen. I'm prepared to call the question in the room. All those in favour? All those opposed? To the phones or virtual, as it were, all those in favour? All those opposed? In the famous words of Speaker Cooper,

I believe the ayes have it.

Carried forward now, at this point a motion can be brought from the floor. MLA Hunter caught my eye.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the motion be amended by (a) striking out "approve" and substituting "amend" and (b) by adding "to a revised amount of \$11,150,000" after "in the amount of \$11,588,000."

The Chair: Okay. Just give us a sec to get the items on here, and if there's anything further that you want to add while we're getting that up on the screen, then please proceed, sir. If not, we can just take a quick pause.

Mr. Hunter: Well, I would say that in this situation the cross-jurisdictional analysis showed that there are no comparable budgets for the election officers across Canada and that every province will fund its election officers very differently. However, the office did say that the extra \$438,000 that they were looking for was specifically for if there was a referendum. But they also said that in the event there was a referendum, they would come back and they would ask for supplementary supply. I think that if they're going to

come back anyway, we might as well just keep it out of the budget. If there is a referendum, they can come back in and ask for that additional money.

The Chair: Any other discussion on the motion? MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Sure. Maybe this is a better place to put my comments. Once again, you know, we're delaying a decision that was very clear from the presentation, and there is a member sitting on this committee that believes that his little budget trim, whatever this is, is in the best interest of Albertans when we heard from the officers of this department, this office, this independent office, that let us know what they needed this for. It all made sense. There were no questions about reductions during that presentation. We've already lost an independent Election Commissioner, so I would hope that we would want to bulk up oversight in very important pieces of our democracy, which are elections. Once again, we've got one member who thinks, "Let's waste a bit more time to do this at another meeting at a later date" when this budget makes perfect sense based on the presentation we received.

I'll end there. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I have MLA Ellingson, and then I have MLA Dyck.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize. I didn't see who in the room had said what that difference was and where the difference was being allocated to a referendum, but I thank you for that because that was going to be my question; you know, what was the justification for that dollar amount to be removed? I guess my question now would be – I could stand back and say that I'm totally fine with that. However, there's no guarantee that when the supplemental request comes later, should there be a referendum, that request would be approved. If there is a referendum called and that budgetary allotment to conduct a referendum is not approved, then where are we?

The Chair: Okay. MLA Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you so very much, Chair. Yeah, I just want to agree with this number. We're just pulling out that initial referendum amount, \$438,000, which is a significant number of dollars. I agree: if they're going to come back anyway, let's get a full budget. They're going to have that opportunity to ask in the future. Instead of splitting that and getting that later on, another small amount or whatever that amount is, let's get it all in one so that Alberta taxpayers have a clear idea of what that cost is. I agree with this amendment and will be voting in favour of it.

The Chair: Okay. Any other members for discussion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? All those opposed? On the lines, all those in favour? And those opposed? I believe the ayes have it.

Motion carried.

Okay. Now we go to the motion as amended, and we vote on that. I'll call the question on the motion as amended. We'll put it up there. Maybe, everyone, grab a coffee if you have a chance. We'll give our clerk a chance to put it up. You got it? Okay. Well, I'm going to take a sip of water.

2:30

Okay. Now we're back to discussion at this point on the motion as amended. Any discussion points?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. Those in favour as amended, please say aye. Those opposed? On the line, those in favour? Those opposed? Okay.

I believe the ayes have it.

Well, that was easy. I need one of those buttons from Staples. MLA Chapman, you have a . . .

Ms Chapman: Are we moving the next motion?

The Chair: If you let me get to it. You're too quick on the draw. Gunfighter fast: I like that.

Ms Chapman: Once I've got your eyes, I'll take them. I'll take them.

The Chair: All right. The next item that we had up as a motion that was tabled was for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for the fiscal year. The Child and Youth Advocate had requested \$16,913,000. Do committee members have any thoughts or comments on this request?

Ms Chapman: I'd like to move the motion as presented.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Chapman: Do you need me to read it out?

The Chair: Yeah. Sure. Go ahead.

Ms Chapman: Yeah? I'll move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the proposed budget submission for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the amount of \$16,913,000.

The Chair: All right. For the record that's how you get the chair's attention. There's no question there.

Having heard the motion, any discussion? MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I would move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices consider an amended total for the proposed budget submission for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Chair: Okay. So we're back to – consent is the first discussion point, and once that's established, if passed, then we go back to the amendment of the motion. If failed, then we're back on the regular motion.

With that, any discussion on what MLA Hunter has moved? MLA Chapman.

Ms Chapman: I think you've heard these talking points from my colleagues here already, but I just want to get it on the record that I really disagree with some of the mechanisms that are being used here. I think that the point of having substantive motions being submitted in advance of these meetings is to give the members of this committee, all members of this committee, you know, the time to sit down to look at those motions, to do our research, and also for the public that are watching to know what they're walking into. I'm just registering my objection to this course of business.

The Chair: Okay. Any other further discussion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question here in the room. All those in favour? Opposed? On the phones, all those in favour? Opposed? Okay.

Motion carried.

We're allowing motions to come from the floor. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the motion be amended by (a) striking out "approve" and substituting "amend" and by adding "to a revised amount of \$16,545,305" after "in the amount of \$16,913,000".

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Hunter. Just wait for a chance to get that on the board, and if you want to just check that out, MLA Hunter. Make sure that's consistent with what you had read.

Ms Robert: The revised number is not correct, I don't think.

The Chair: You want to look at the revised number, MLA Hunter?

Mr. Hunter: It is correct.

Ms Robert: Oh, no, it is correct. Is that correct?

Mr. Hunter: That is correct.

Ms Robert: We're good. Sorry. Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

We'll open it up for discussion at this point. MLA Ellington. Ellington; sorry, sir. You got my attention online.

Mr. Ellington: Mr. Chair, thank you. Don't worry; putting a "t" in my name is the most common error. I blame it on the musician, the Duke.

My question here – and maybe I'm pre-empting; somebody was already going to jump in and give this answer. What are we proposing to remove from the budget presented by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to come up with this number? I'm curious. This one is curious to me because this is a very small amount of money both for the budget of this office and the overall budget that we're considering with the government of Alberta.

I feel like nickel and diming this office is the most egregious amendment brought forward to this committee today. This office does more important work, arguably, than any other office that we could think of, protecting the children of Alberta. In the throne speech it was made very clear that this government intends to cut services to Albertans, with a commitment to spend an increase of the budget that would be less than population increase and less than the inflationary increase. And that's particularly important with this budget: population increase. I'm assuming that this office would have considered an increase in the number of cases, an increase in the number of children in Alberta, an increase in the number of families in Alberta that are living under stress, causing more instances that need to be supported and investigated. Of the amendments that have come forward today, this one: I'm sorry; I just have to say that I cannot stand by this and that it cannot be justified.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, MLA.

I have Renaud, Dyck, and then Hunter.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I would encourage people to go back to *Hansard* and look at the comments that were made by members of this committee, not just all of the members of this committee, when the office of the Child and Youth Advocate did their budget presentation on what they expected would be coming. I just want to remind members, and I know that we can all express shock when we see the reports that come out, that there are a record number of children who died in care – a record number – and that we should all be shocked and asking: what can we do to bulk up this office and encourage them to do all of the work that they need to do, to ensure that we understand why this is happening, so that we can change

things, so that we can make recommendations to stop this alarming pattern or this alarming trend? The fact that members of this committee are wanting to, again, nickel and dime an independent office that is tasked with some of the most important work in this province is just shocking.

I just wanted to register my comments. Thank you.

The Chair: I have MLAs Dyck, Hunter, and Eremenko.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you so much, Chair. I just want, as we're just chatting and debating this – this is what we're presenting, this number. Thank you, MLA Hunter, for this. This is an increase of last year's budget of 2.1 per cent. And just so everyone understands the context: Alberta is the best funded child and youth advocacy in the country. This also includes the 2.1 increase on I believe it's just over \$4 million for legal representation in the budget. So this also increases their legal representation.

I agree; I think we need to be on point with this number. I agree with the number that MLA Hunter has presented. This is a government operational increase of 2.1 per cent, and I think this is a reasonable number to increase their budget by as we support the work. I agree that their work is very important, and this is why this government is making steps forward in order to increase by 2.1 per cent.

Thank you for the comments, Chair, and the opportunity.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Hunter.

2:40

Mr. Hunter: Yeah. I just will state that, again, Alberta's OCYA budget is \$3.8 million higher than the B.C. budget. This is what was important about coming up with a cross-jurisdictional analysis to be able to understand that.

I think that, again, there were comments made earlier by Member Ellingson that I'm just not sure if I understood his – maybe I didn't understand his points properly. But in terms of helping protect children and youth, you know, that is the role of the ministry, and they do that work with all of their hearts, minds, and strength. We've got a great minister, Minister Turton. I know him very personally and that he is very, very engaged and cares very deeply about the children and the youth of this province.

The government's budget is a 2.1 per cent increase, so we are seeing an increase in the budget for that ministry, which does the actual in-the-trenches work at a 2.1 per cent increase. I think that it is reasonable to be able to have the Child and Youth Advocate also have that 2.1 per cent, that they could also fit within those parameters of being able to provide the advocacy for children and youth.

The Chair: MLA Eremenko, you're next.

Member Eremenko: The report makes it very, very clear that the reason that the budget for the OCYA in Alberta is that much higher than B.C. is because it does something that B.C. doesn't do and that that program is worth \$4.4 million. I'm curious. I have two questions for the member opposite, through you, Mr. Chair, that I hope he maybe can speak to.

One, is the member proposing that we actually change the mandate of the OCYA and remove the legal representation because at some point the ministry can take care of it? Because that's not a topic of the conversation today by any means. This is about adequately resourcing the demands and the growth in that demand on an office of the Legislature. So I think that addressing whether or not the mandate is appropriate or if there's overlap with what the ministry does: that is not up to this committee to decide. I find it entirely not relevant to the conversation.

The report, again, is not an excuse to make this cut when it makes it very, very clear that the comparison between Alberta and B.C. is not an apples-to-apples comparison. Far, far from it. Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the member who put this motion forward: what is the rationale here? What is going to take the hit in this cut, why this amount, and what's the rationale?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Now, just to be clear here, guys . . .

Member Eremenko: Sorry. No disrespect. Apologies.

The Chair: No, no. No worries. I can't hold a candle to Coop when it comes to this stuff; there's no question.

But part of it, too, is with the debate side. So just to make sure that everyone understands, with the debate – it's the debate speaking through the chair in estimates – you can ask ministers questions about their budgets, those types of things. This would be totally open for discussion and debate. If you're asking questions of other members, it would be totally up to them if they caught the speaker's eye and wished to respond. If they choose not to, just understand that it's a different format.

Member Eremenko: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. With that, is there any other – oh, it looks like Mr. Ellingson. I was going to give you a "t" again, but I got corrected. Thank you for that. Duke Ellington, one of our favourites. You're up next, sir. I see your hand on the line here.

Mr. Ellingson: For sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I just want to provide some clarifying points that I think my colleague MLA Eremenko had just raised. Just to reiterate that, yes, Alberta performs a service that British Columbia does not and that the extensive research report that was provided to us says that that additional work is approximately \$4.4 million per year. If we look at the operational budget of \$15.9 and we remove \$4.4, I think it's pretty evident now that a comparable budget with British Columbia is that Alberta's budget is lower.

Now, presumably, the members across will make the argument again that Alberta's population is lower than British Columbia's population and so we should be spending less than British Columbia. However, the research report also includes for us the population under the age of 19 and the population under the age of 24. I'd like to point out to the members opposite that in both cases Alberta's population of youth exceeds British Columbia's. Now we're spending less on a population that is more, so you cannot say that we are the most favourably funded office in the country. That is simply wrong.

Now let's talk about the increase that is proposed of 2.1 per cent. Our population growth is 4.3 per cent, so you're proposing an increase that – never mind other inflationary pressures – is half of the population growth. Again, this cannot be justified.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

I had MLA Lundy.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's important to reiterate that this is a 2.1 per cent increase. It seems to be that we're conflating this notion of the 4.4 per cent within the budget. That's not what's being talked about here. We would think that the 2.1 per cent that's being included on top of their ask would, of course, be inclusive in continuing this service.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect.

With that, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? All those opposed? I'll go to the phones. Those in favour? Opposed? Okay.

Motion carried.

Now the amendment has been amended, and then we go back to the amended motion. I actually might get the hang of this yet, you guys, by the end of the meeting.

Any further discussion on the amended motion?

Mr. Hunter: I don't have to read that in, right?

The Chair: No. Let's get it up on the screen. Okay. Folks, we have the motion as amended up on the screen. Any discussion on the amended motion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. Those in favour of the amended motion, please say aye. Opposed? On the phones, video, as it were. Those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed?

Mr. Ellingson: No, and I'd like a recorded vote.

The Chair: Oh, sure. We have a process for this. I'm being advised by those who are wiser than I on procedures that we announce the record for the vote. I had the ayes as having it, so that motion would have been carried.

We now had a flag thrown on the play – using some football vernacular – of a recorded vote by MLA Ellingson, so now we'll go to that nice procedure of which a recorded vote has been requested.

Those in the room in favour of the amendment, please raise your hands, and the committee clerk will call out the names. So those in favour of the motion.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see the hon. Mr. Hunter and Mr. Lundy.

The Chair: And those opposed to the motion in the room.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see Ms Eremenko, Ms Renaud, and Ms Chapman.

The Chair: Just to make things a little inconsistent, when it goes to the video, the clerk will call out your names, and you will let her know who's in favour . . .

Ms Robert: Or opposed.

The Chair: Or opposed, but she'll call your name, and you'll either say "for" or "against."

2:50

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see Mr. Ellingson.

Mr. Ellingson: Against.

Ms Rempel: Thank you. I see Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: In favour.

Ms Rempel: I see Mr. Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: In favour.

Ms Rempel: I see Mr. Long.

Mr. Long: In favour.

The Chair: Everyone online who is a committee member, you have all been recorded, from what my count is. We'll just wait for the results from the clerk.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have five votes in favour of the motion as amended and four against.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

Well, thank you. It was close to call on the voice vote, but we got her by one, so we'll carry on with that.

Motion is now carried.

Give me one second. Sorry, you guys. This is good.

Ms Chapman: I figured you out. I figured you out.

The Chair: Let me at least look down first.

All right. We finished off the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The next one for consideration is the office of the Ethics Commissioner. The final budget submission of the day is \$1,083,500 for the discussion of the Ethics Commissioner. Again, this one is open to discussion. It was tabled. MLA Hunter caught my eye this time after I've actually read. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices consider an amendment total for the proposed budget submission for the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

The Chair: Okay. We all should be experts at this point. We're going to look for consent to allow motions from the floor. I'll open that up for discussion. MLA Chapman, you did catch my eye, but it was a second after I actually got a chance to go back to my script and read the office we were looking at next.

Ms Chapman: I'll save it for when we get to it.

The Chair: With that, if there's no other debate in the room, I'll call the question. Okay. Prepared to call. Those in favour? Opposed? Online, those in favour? Those opposed?

Motion carried.

MLA Hunter, please continue.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices amend the proposed budget submission for the office of the Ethics Commissioner for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the amount of \$8,083,500 to a revised amount of \$1,021,000.

Just to give – do you want me to wait till . . .

Ms Robert: Could you read it again? The first number was not correct. The first number you said \$8 million something.

Mr. Hunter: Sorry. One million. Dyslexia. Sorry. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices amend the proposed budget submission for the office of the Ethics Commissioner for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the amount of \$1,083,500 to a revised amount of \$1,021,000.

My apologies.

The Chair: Well, thank you, MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Can I give my rationale now?

The Chair: Sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: So the rationale is similar to the arguments that we made in the past in that this is commensurate with the 2.1 per cent increase that the government is going to be seeing, and we feel that that is the proper amount for these offices also, to be able to see the

increase. This is an increase from year over year, but it is a 2.1 per cent increase versus the increase that they have asked for.

The Chair: I had MLA Chapman and Renaud.

Ms Chapman: Speaking to the amount – right? – is where I'm at?

The Chair: That's right.

Ms Chapman: Okay. Thank you so much. Again, I would like to speak against this proposed reduction in the ask from the office of the Ethics Commissioner. Now, again, I very much took the point from our research team on the complication with doing this crossjurisdictional scan. And I'm a bit confused as to why we would ask for such a document and then not use what information was available in it. This is an office where I found it a lot easier to parse the budget amounts with the amount of service that the office was providing. For example, in Alberta the operational budget for 2023-24 was \$1 million, and then the number of people subject to financial reporting was 286. Right? That's every member, unlike other provinces, as I heard. We do include deputy ministers, senior officials, some party staff, and so that's why that number is bigger than other provinces. Also, the office of the lobbyist – in other provinces it's a separate office, and here in Alberta it's the same, so on top of the financial reporting from the 286 folks we have 2,709 registered lobbyists. Yeah. Again, on an operational budget of \$1 million.

Now let's look at our closest comparator province, British Columbia. Now, their office budget – \$786,000 – is just for the financial reporting for 87 members, right? What I see when I look at this lovely research that was put together for me is that Alberta is doing a lot more than other provinces with less, so it is really challenging for me to stomach a reduction in the amounts that are requested by these offices to continue the important work that they do.

Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. To caution members, I've got Renaud, Ellingson, and we have three minutes because I'll need at least one minute to have a vote.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Really quickly I'm going to go – oh, sorry. You said my name. Okay. Just really quickly to the letter that we received from the hon. Marguerite Trussler. I thought it was a really great picture, a snapshot of the budgets going all the way back to 2014 and where it increased, but what was most important is that

she reiterated her comments that we all heard in committee when we had the officers here to explain why they needed the increase they were presenting.

The only way to reduce the budget of my office is to reduce the position of the next Ethics Commissioner from a 0.8 full time equivalent (FTE) to 0.7 . . . full time equivalent (FTE). [Now, that could be a reduction in] travel expenses, but the Committee should note that my travelling to Calgary to meet government officials and Calgary-based political staff is less expensive to the Government's overall budget than having them all travel to Edmonton. It is also less time consuming [to meet with the Ethics Commissioner]. A decrease in travel expenses seems contradictory to the public interest.

Now, Mr. Chair, these are the comments that we heard from Marguerite Trussler, who is very clear that when they did outsource some work to legal counsel, I believe it was her that said – again, I'll need to check *Hansard*, but I believe she said that there were some lawyers that were used that their pay needed to go up based on a decision made.

That was out of her hands as well. She is clearly telling us that, you know, she will likely be replaced but that the next Ethics Commissioner will have less time to do the volume of work that my colleague MLA Chapman outlined in terms of the Lobbyists Act, the Conflicts of Interest Act, not to mention the disclosures from political staff and MLAs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Members, I apologize. We have two minutes, so I'm going to close debate on this. If we're good with that, I'd like to call the question.

In the room here. All those in favour? Those opposed? Those online. All those in favour? Those opposed? I believe the ayes have it. With that,

motion carried.

Any other business at this point, folks? The next item on the agenda is that the next meeting date will be called at the discretion of the chair. With a minute and 30 seconds left is there anyone prepared to call an adjournment motion?

Ms Chapman: I motion that we adjourn.

The Chair: Having heard that, all in favour? Opposed?

Thanks a bunch, folks. Take care.

[The committee adjourned at 2:59 p.m.]

