

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, good morning ladies and gentlemen. Several weeks ago we put out a notice for the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services to have a regular meeting. We've scheduled two days, December 12 and 13. The agenda had us going from 10 in the morning to noon and from 1 o'clock to 4 p.m. on both days and the place the Confederation Room, where we're at. All members of the committee are here, and I welcome you and I thank you. For those of you who had to drive a considerable distance, I very much appreciate it.

The first thing that we have is the approval of the agenda. You see the agenda. It's been published. It's been posted, made public. All members received this several weeks ago and had no additional items to the agenda other than Mr. Wickman, who called me yesterday indicating he wanted to add an item to the agenda.

Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The item I would like to add to the agenda is extended benefits for constituency caucus and Legislative Assembly staff.

THE CHAIRMAN: Extended benefits for constituency office and Legislative Assembly staff.

MR. WICKMAN: Right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Then we would add it as 7(b) under New Business.

Would there be additional items that hon. members might want to add to this agenda? I take it the agenda is as it is then? Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Then number 3, Approval of Minutes of February 3, 2000. Those minutes were circulated to all members many, many months ago, but they're in your binder again. Do we have approval for that? Mr. Clegg moved. Dr. Pannu seconded it, I take it. Any discussion? All in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Business Arising from the Minutes. The first item: the MLA Health Benefits Package Long-Term Disability Insurance Provisions. There was a review of that made. You'll recall when we were meeting in February of last year that the way the disability program operates – and I have some specific concerns about it – is that in essence should a Member of the Legislative Assembly become ill or disabled, we have an allocation that we make to Alberta Treasury, and we then would have that member access a program by a third-party carrier. Our annual fee is in the neighbourhood, Mr. Clerk, as I recall, of about a \$110,000 contribution.

But interestingly enough, under all of the laws that we have in Alberta and under the Legislative Assembly Act, everything dealing with members comes under the purview of the Members' Services Committee except one area, and that one area is disability. In the case of disability, it's Executive Council that has to deal with that. So in reviewing the legislation over the summer, I made a suggestion that perhaps the first thing we should do is have this matter referred

to the jurisdiction of the Members' Services Committee, away from Executive Council. Suggestions were made that perhaps the easiest way of dealing with that would have been during the fall session by way of an amendment to the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, where that matter would move from Executive Council responsibility to Members' Services responsibility, and then we would be in a position to deal with the issue and come up with a series of recommendations that might be looked at by a future Members' Services Committee.

As it turned out, because of, I guess, the agenda that we had in the fall, that provision was not contained in the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, so it's a matter that sits there. As it is right now, if a member were to suffer a disability under the categories defined, that would have to be a matter resolved by Executive Council, i.e. the cabinet, and Members' Services have no role to play in it.

I will continue consultations with the various caucuses into the future, and perhaps at an upcoming session of the Legislative Assembly there would be intercaucus approval to basically work on this and have it transferred to Members' Services. But as it is right now, it's a purview of Executive Council, cabinet, and not the Members' Services body. That's where we're at in terms of an update.

MS HALEY: Mr. Chairman, I guess the only thing I really wanted to say was that I would hope that you would continue to work towards having it moved over to Members' Services so that it can be dealt with as a whole package for MLAs.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think that would be the prudent thing, because whatever happened in the past when all of these other things were moved over to Members' Services – I don't know if it was an oversight or something that nobody paid any attention to, but it's the one area in terms of the whole gamut of the whole package that we cannot deal with. So that's where we're at at the moment. No member, by the way, has ever in the history of the province of Alberta been able to access that particular program.

DR. PANNU: Have members applied and then been turned down?

THE CHAIRMAN: In recent years I'm unaware of any member having applied. I have counseled a number of members to pursue the matter in the time that I've been here, and their conclusion at the end was: no, they wouldn't.

So (b) Sponsorship – School-at-the-Legislature Program. I indicated in the minutes, the last time we had a meeting, on February 3, that one of the programs we would work toward is trying to create a new program called School at the Legislature. It's to be an outreach program. I also indicated that the initiative we would take with this one would not be at the request of the Members' Services Committee for any dollars for this program per se but that we would go to the private sector and ask the private sector if they would be interested in coming and working with us on such a program.

Several weeks ago, in fact on November 20 in the year 2000, we successfully had the package concluded, and we have three corporate sponsors that are working with us. We have Shaw Communications, Capital City Savings, and the Quality Group of Companies. In terms of the dollars and goods that they have provided for the School at the Legislature, I think it amounts to something, again, Mr. Clerk, around \$65,000. I think two of them have contributed \$25,000 in cash to this program and the third one, \$15,000 in goods.

We got the school under way, and it's now operational. To this date we're going to test it for a year to see how it goes. The three

corporate sponsors were absolutely delighted to be a part of it. We have an advertisement out right now for a co-ordinator of it, with the competition to close on, I believe, December 15, 2000. We'll be working hand in hand with the three corporate sponsors, and in the meantime this School at the Legislature hopefully will become a fully functioning body.

In essence, what it is is classrooms where classes of kids can come in and spend five days here, Monday through Friday. It's in addition to all the other programs that we have, but in the case of this one, not funded by any request made of the Members' Services Committee and funded entirely by the private sector.

I did indicate at that time that perhaps one of the things we would have to do is have some big corporate signs put up in some of these buildings around these precincts . . . [some laughter] And that's the kind of reaction I got then too. But you have to recognize the contributions. Perhaps I'll have to have a consultation with the minister of public works, supply, and services and see how we can get some corporate logos up in some of the buildings around here to at least acknowledge that. They are doing it, it's very positive, and I very much appreciate their involvement.

We had a ceremony here on November 20. A number of you participated, and I hope that the schools in the future throughout the whole province of Alberta will take advantage of the opportunity to come here and join with the other things as well.

Does anybody have any comments or questions with respect to that?

Okay. The third one, then, is Review of Extraordinary Temporary Residence Allowance, and I do believe there's a notice in the binder with respect to that. At the last committee Mr. Gibbons had moved that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services ask the Clerk to review current expenditures on the extraordinary temporary residence allowance, and report back to the Committee during the 2001-2002 budget estimate process, with a view to determining the adequacy of the current allocation of \$100 per overnight stay.

The way our program works is that members may travel throughout the province of Alberta for up to five nights per year. In 1992 or 1993 the figure of \$100 per overnight stay to cover the cost of accommodation and food and what have you was allocated. This number has not been looked at since then. We have reviewed it, the Clerk and I, and the upcoming item that we have under the budget, number 6, contains no provisions for improvements in anything in the MLA package. So other than reviewing it, the conclusion that was reached at this point in time is we wouldn't add anything or have anything included in the budget with respect to this for reasons that I'll come to in a few minutes from now, when we deal with the parameters of the budget.

#### 10:10

It's been reviewed. We're getting some figures and statistics in terms of consultation with the Alberta hotel industry to see what the standards have been and what's changed in the last seven or eight years with respect to this. But other than having reviewed it, Mr. Gibbons, we have done nothing further by way of recommendation for implementation, and if there's something further you'd like to add, please do.

MR. GIBBONS: From conversation with you, that you're looking into it and that we'll be talking about it in the budget and hopefully in the future, I'm okay with it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other comments?

Well, that's Business Arising from the Minutes.

Under Old Business we are continuing to work on additional provisions in terms of committee rooms in the precincts, the

precincts including this building and the Annex building. Mr. Clerk, why don't you bring us up to date with respect to that?

DR. McNEIL: Yes. We have been working with Alberta Infrastructure on developing two committee rooms on the fourth floor of the Annex. We've reached the point where we've had the design approved.

Now, these rooms would accommodate any legislative committee or other committee. We would have the appropriate built-in setup for *Hansard*, have the capacity for video conferencing, at least be wired for such, have waiting rooms for people who are invited to attend these meetings and so on, and have areas for the press. They'd be modular so that the furniture could be set up to accommodate the number of individuals who would be around the table at that meeting. So it'd be a little more conducive to meetings than, shall we say, room 512 or even the Chamber at times.

THE CHAIRMAN: There would be no cost provision required of Members' Services for this as it would be a service provided by Alberta Infrastructure. So we're continuing to work on that. Will there be anything forthcoming for that? Okay. Thank you very much.

Number 6, 2001-2002 Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates. You have a second document in addition to the document that we're currently working from, and that is the estimates book. Again, this was circulated a week or so ago to all members. If I could just draw your attention to it and, if you'd permit me, spend a few minutes with you in terms of the background.

The first thing, just to draw it to your attention again, in terms of the current year's budget, the budget that goes from April 1, 2000, to March 31, 2001, is that I provided to you on April 20, 2000, the updates for the budget arising as a result of April 1 kicking in. You've had that, so it's not included in this book because it was circulated to you in April of this year.

What you have in this document, first of all, if I can just take you to the overview, is Role of the Legislative Assembly Office, the roles that we've identified. There was no change in these roles. They're the same roles that we talked about last year, exactly the same, the same definitions, and basically with number 1, supporting members; number 2, supporting the Speaker; number 3, recording the proceedings and maintaining and preserving the records; number 4, informing and educating the public; number 5, supporting the Assembly in protecting its institutions and privileges; number 6, supporting the exchange of ideas/information among Legislatures throughout the world; and seven, providing services to external clients as required. No change in that at all. We went through it before.

Under B, The 2001-2004 Planning Environment, the background that goes into the preparation of this particular budget. Of course, needless to say, the most important and immediate issue that we all face is planning and managing the transition from the 24th to the 25th Legislatures. Now, I don't know when this is going to take place. It could very well take place in this current fiscal year, or it could take place in the next fiscal year, but the preparation work that has to go into that in terms of that transition is very important.

The one officer in the whole system that remains constant until there's a change in the position is the office of the Speaker. The Speaker, of course, goes from the election of the Speaker to the election of the next Speaker, and regardless of when the election is and regardless of whether or not the incumbent Speaker is a candidate or is defeated, he or she still remains the Speaker until the Legislature reconvenes and one day prior to that elects a new Speaker. That's the continuity in terms of the whole parliamentary

system, and it's a very important one, so the responsibility of managing it and planning for that transition remains one of the most acute items that we have in terms of the time cycle.

Secondly, next year we will be hosting the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Canadian Regional Conference in July of 2001. It's Alberta's turn in 2001. We get it every 11 or 12 years. The last time we hosted it was in 1989, and it turns out that next year it will be hosted and we'll have it here in Edmonton three weeks prior to the World Track and Field Games, the third week of July.

We're continuing, of course, to work hand in hand with members and all the caucuses to ensure that morale is high and that we deal with the technology as it becomes accrual to us. One of the background things is the continuing work that we're doing in celebration of the centennial in 2005.

So in terms of the specifics, you'll see the other information that's in there: (a) election preparedness; (b) technological development, and I'll come back to that in a minute or two from now; (c) constituency office support. When we had the meeting in February, two major items that this committee said they wanted to see reviews and recommendations forthcoming on: first of all, the technological side and the utilization by members of technology, however you want to define that, and then ensuring that the constituency offices throughout the province of Alberta basically did have the proper desks and chairs and equipment and what have you.

The second major parameter is Public Education, and basically I've talked about that already, I think.

The third one is Interparliamentary Relations. I'd just make mention again of the fact that next year we'll have this major conference. We'll continue to participate in the various programs of the CPA – that's the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – and the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie. We hosted a German delegation of parliamentarians here, 16 of them from six or seven länder of Germany, and next year we may be participating in an exchange return visit.

The fourth one: Development of the LAO Workforce. Again, professional development is a major factor.

Item C in there is Performance Measures. Well, we judge ourselves basically along a number of areas. First of all, the provision of timely, professional, impartial advice to members, and members who feel they're not getting timely professional or impartial advice are pretty quick to call me, saying that, you know, it's slow or it's not timely or it's not impartial. Quite frankly, I haven't had any complaints from anybody in the last year, so I don't know how you'd rank that.

Secondly, the provision of timely, accurate information to members. Again, our complaint file is not very thick.

Thirdly, the provision of services, equipment, supplies, and facilities to members on a timely basis. In this area there have been a number of concerns, and that's why later we will be responding to these concerns in terms of that.

#### 10:20

Fourthly, the provision of an effective workforce to support members. Again, morale in all areas is extremely important, and one of the things I've tried to do is in fact bring into the fray the support staff that all members have in their constituency offices about the province of Alberta. We had one professional development seminar in the spring, one in Edmonton and in Calgary. Then we had another one in the fall, and last week we did invite all of the constituency office staff to attend with us a Legislative Assembly of Alberta appreciation and recognition dinner, where we provide recognition for people with five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years of service. Interestingly enough, at this recognition dinner last Thursday there

were two people on the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office with 25 years' service. They're working here in the Legislative Assembly. One was in the library, and the other person is in the *Hansard* area.

Even more incredible than that – I mean, in this environment I can see you working 25 years – there were two women who have now served 20 years in a constituency office. Now, when you recognize that the average length of service of an elected person has been 8.1 years, to have a constituency office staff person in a constituency office for 20 years, it literally means that she – in this case both of them were women – has served upwards of three different members. That's quite remarkable. We've never, ever had that happen before. So there was need to pat them on the back and say some nice things about them and make them feel good about it. It was very much appreciated by all of the other constituency office people as well.

Number 5, the provision of support to maintain and develop the parliamentary system in Alberta. I've got listed in there a whole series of things, including the stuff we're doing in the documentation and recording of the Assembly, the Legislature Library, Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. This year will be the third year of that, the third week of April, and we still have our corporate sponsor, the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. They participate with a grant of \$25,000, and they provide an incredible amount of manpower services in supervising and working with the teachers and the young people that do come here.

The rest of it is going again. School tours of the Legislature continue to grow. We anticipate that there will be a minimum of 8,000 to 8,500 people in this building during the month of December simply because we've got choirs booked every day. It's quite a popular thing.

Item D, LAO Strategic Goals. It's essentially a duplication of what I've just talked about: assisting members, assisting the Speaker, providing members with professional development opportunities, the fostering of interparliamentary co-operation, increased awareness, and increased efficiency and effectiveness.

That's the background, hon. members, in terms of this. As I've said, we've reviewed it previously with you. If there are any specific questions on any of these items, I'd be happy to respond now.

MS HALEY: I'd just like to make a comment, Mr. Chairman, in appreciation of your hosting our staff up here. It doesn't happen really often that the constituency office staff get to come to Edmonton, but my assistant was one of those 20-year ladies, and I received a letter from her thanking all of us and particularly you for making her feel so special when she came up here. So I just wanted to thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I appreciate that very much.

I want to show you something now which is part of all of this, and that's dealing with the history. You'll recall that in the previous meetings we've had, I said that I was requesting some dollars from the Members' Services Committee to work on something that, in my humble opinion, we're pretty lacking in, and that's dealing with the history of Alberta as a Legislature, the history of Alberta as a parliament.

We have some pictures in this building, but if you travel the world and you look at other Legislatures and other parliaments, they do focus to a much higher degree on history than we have ever done. Maybe it's because we're very young – we've only been a province since 1905 – or maybe it is because we don't believe that we have any heroes, or maybe we've just never had time to deal with the historical side of it all. One of the things that I asked you for support on and you gave to me is basically looking at all of the Legislatures

from 1905 to the current one and culminating in the year 2005 and recognition of the participants of all of those various Legislatures. So we've done a lot of work and a lot of cuts and a lot of drafts and a lot of preparation to try and arrive at some commemorative plaque for each one of the various Legislatures of Alberta since 1905.

Well, I think it's about 99 percent true now. I'm not sure that there's much improvement that can be made on it at this point in time, because we've cut it about 12 times. This is what one of the Legislatures would look like. This is the period from 1926 to 1930. So you have to recognize that our database of the pictures we had and everything else had to be assembled, had to be found in various museums and the like.

What we would have is one of these for each one of the Legislature terms from 1905. Now, this one is 1926 to 1930. If you look at the upper right-hand corner, that's the coat of arms of the province of Alberta, and that would be a stationary thing because our coat of arms has never changed. On the right-hand side is the Mace of the day. That is the Mace that we had in Alberta in that time frame. Future ones of these would show a different Mace because we did change it.

Then we have all of the pictures that we've been able to find. We've had to have artists to upgrade them, to touch them up, and to get the printing done. It was not simply a matter of doing a photostat and putting it into this to make sure that it was all done. So all of these individuals who were part of the Legislature of Alberta from 1926 to 1930 and their names and what have you will be there.

In each one of these we're going to have some historic items popping out, something that happened during that time. There's some degree of risk for someone like myself basically saying nay or yea to certain pictures, because historians get to be pretty jealous about what the most important things are. So one of the things on this particular plaque that happened in the '26 to '30 time frame was that the wild rose became the official emblem of Alberta. So when things like this happened, they will be incorporated in it.

You see pictures in it. The top picture is a picture of a parade demonstration in Alberta reflective of, quote, the stock market crash of 1929 and, quote, the Great Depression. The second one shows an airplane arriving – Bill, is that in Edmonton or Calgary?

MR. GANO: Edmonton.

THE CHAIRMAN: The first commercial postal service in Alberta occurred at that time with a plane arriving in Edmonton.

The third one down there is of the Famous Five, the women who were part of the Persons Case, who came from Alberta. It was during that time frame that the case was won in the Privy Council of Great Britain, which is part of the history of Alberta.

The last one at the bottom. Commercial radio came to Alberta in that time frame, 1926 to 1930, so what you've got there is a picture of a music crew at a radio station in Alberta playing, because I guess in those days that's the way it was. They didn't have records as we know it today. If you had music on the air, you had a band or an orchestra. That's one that's reflective of the day.

The mosaic at the bottom shows not the map of Alberta but the population of Alberta in that time frame.

As these things move through – and there'll be several done prior to 1905 showing the heritage of our native people, our aboriginal people, and the history of Alberta as could be found in the previous-to-1905 period with the North-West Territories. Then we will go right up – the last one we will do will be at the conclusion of this Legislature. We'll not be able to do one for the time frame 2001 to 2005 until the 2005 time frame is done.

Then what I'd like to do is consult with all of you and make a

suggestion. Where would you put such an inventory of history? I'd like to suggest that you look at the pedway that goes down the steps of this building as you get out to the parkades. There's that long area in there where you go through one access door to the second access door before you come up to where the circular steps are, where you get to the elevators. Maybe we could call that area the Members' Way or something and have on one side the previous history of Alberta and going up to 2005. In the next hundred years they could start going the other way, and we'll all come back in 105 years from now and see 200 years of history of Alberta.

That's part of one of many programs that we would do. The background is parchment to sort of suggest that it's old.

Thank you very much, by the way, for supporting this. I like doing this sort of stuff. I appreciate it.

Yes, Mr. Coutts.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I think that's an excellent idea, and the way that you've displayed it, you know, bringing in the history of the particular time that those members were in place in the Legislature, is really important. I'm really pleased that you'll go back previous to our history, bringing in the North-West Territories. I was very pleased to hear you say that, and I'm hoping that in that history you'll take a look at the involvement of Sir Frederick Haultain, the first Premier of the North-West Territories, of course, in that he comes from my hometown.

10:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, all right, Mr. Coutts. The difficulty we're going to have in here is that I'm going to consult with historians of some repute in the province of Alberta so that one does not get lobbied to say: well, this is, you know, because of whatever it is. I'm sure that Mr. Haultain, because he was the Premier, would find a spot someplace in this, but thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: Could I make a comment, sir?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. SLOAN: Could I make a comment just in relation to the strategy goals?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. SLOAN: It's not really questions, but just a couple of comments in reading them. A couple of things struck me in terms of the terminology that was being used to characterize the role of the LAO. Specifically, I noted the sort of repetitive use of parliamentary versus democracy. I recognize that we have acquired in this province a certain definition about parliamentary versus democracy, and I think the efforts of the Speaker to incorporate more public education initiatives to make the Legislature more accessible to the public are acknowledged and appreciated by all members in the Assembly. But there are some other trends which go against that type of openness and public accountability which don't seem to be commented on.

Those are things like the lack of or the unwillingness to utilize all of the standing committees. Again this year we see one of the standing committees, the Law and Regulations Committee, not incorporated in the estimates as a statutory committee for funding. We also have seen – at least over the course of my term of office, which will soon be coming to an end, so I'm not saying this with any personal intent – a decline in the equity of provisions and staffing. When we speak about members and we speak about staff of the Assembly, there is an inherent inequity in how, as an example, staff

of the Official Opposition and staff of the third party are treated versus staff of the LAO.

So I think it's important to point out that there are some trends. I recognize that it may not be within the powers of the current Speaker to address them, but I think there are some indications that our democracy is declining, and the equitability with which we treat members and staff has declined and continues to decline.

I should also speak just with respect to members' salaries. As a current member and soon to be not a member of this Assembly the fact that government chooses to top up the basic MLA salary in favour of government members by committee appointments and other things in my mind hurts our democracy. For high-calibre people who perhaps have an interest in making a contribution to the province, contemplating serving as a member of the opposition is certainly financially not even on par with industry standards. When I could make more as a tenured nurse than I can make as a member of the Assembly, I think we have a problem. When a head of a regional health authority or the head of the WCB can make a quarter of a million dollars and members of this Assembly are barely making over \$50,000, I think we have a problem. So those types of realities and principles.

While I support the goals that are being put forward within the strategic plan of the Assembly, I think it's also important to acknowledge on the record that we have some other realities that should be addressed in a more equitable fashion.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Any other comments from anybody?

MR. GIBBONS: I wonder if I could go back under members' support services and just ask a couple of questions around the transition allowance liability so you can have it on the table. As I'm going through this, is any of the transitional allowance liability part of the \$49 million unfunded liability of the MLAs' pension plan?

THE CHAIRMAN: What section are you talking about?

MR. GIBBONS: Back to Speaker and member support, second page in.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, sir. Okay.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. You heard my question on the \$49 million. Another question is: what is the total transition allowance liability up to March 31, 2000?

THE CHAIRMAN: What did you say? Forty-nine million?

MR. GIBBONS: Is any of the transition allowance liability part of the \$49 million unfunded liabilities of the MLAs' pension plan?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, absolutely not. There's no association. I'm not even sure the first number is correct. I can't even comment on that. I don't know what that is.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. Can you explain the transition allowance?

THE CHAIRMAN: We will at the appropriate time.

Additional comments? Okay.

The next section in here is what we'll go to now and wrap up some of this. You've got the section, the budget preparation parameters, and how did we deal with these. These can be passed

out to our guests, if you wish. They can follow. All members have this.

In terms of preparing this budget, the 2001-2002 budget, the parameters, what is it that I'm bringing to you here today? First of all, the recommendations and direction you gave me at the last Members' Services meeting in February have all been dealt with. Every one of them is included in this budget. Let me just take you through, then, these parameters on a point-by-point basis, and I'll explain that.

First of all, in terms of the dollar figures that you see in this budget, Treasury tells us that they want to see everything estimated to the nearest thousand dollars. This is the only budget in the system that isn't publicly developed in an open, transparent environment. The only one. This is also one of the few jurisdictions in the country where the meetings of Members' Services or the board of internal economy is held in public. In Ottawa it's behind closed doors. In Alberta it's here, open to everyone. We micromanage.

I want to make a comment about what this rounding off is. You may find a number in here that is \$750, but because of the direction to round up to \$1,000, the number goes to \$1,000. So if you took \$250 and \$750, that would be a 33 percent increase. Please don't deal with that mundane thing with me because the answer is that I had to do it to round it off to \$1,000. In the other case, if it was \$740, the figure would go down to \$500 to round it off to the nearest whatever the heck it was. There are very few examples like that, but there'll be the odd one that will come in, so there's your answer to that one.

Secondly, what is the criteria, then, that I have to deal with members? Remember that we are governed by a system in the province of Alberta where the policy we have is that we will deal with the average worker weekly salary index. Now, this is a formula invented by this particular committee, implemented by this committee. Basically, the average weekly earnings index runs on a monthly basis. There are numbers that are kicked out to us by Statistics Canada from actuarial accountants, and there's a copy here for everybody in the room and our guests as well. I've got all these numbers for you going back to the month of January 1983.

In the current fiscal year that we're in, if you remember, we were meeting in February or earlier than that. What we had to do was to get the average weekly earnings of all employees of firms in the province of Alberta. This basically doesn't cover any white-collar workers or professionals, for the most part, for the average weekly of workers. We looked at the numbers for January 1999 and February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November. In each of those months that number would vary. The last time we looked at the budget year for the one we're in right now, April 1, 2000, to March 31, 2001, I asked to have in the budget the number of 2.5 percent, because during the 12 months of that year there were numbers that were bouncing between .8 percent and 2 and a half to 3 percent. Then at the end of the year we had to find all these numbers, divide them by 12, and the number came out to 1.13 percent. So for the salary adjustment for all Members of the Legislative Assembly on April 1, 2000, to March 31, 2001, we got a raise of 1.13 percent.

#### 10:40

So now I have to bring to you a recommendation as to what it would be starting April 1, 2001, to the time frame of March 31, 2002. If you look at the bottom of this sheet, you will see that in January 2000 the average weekly earnings for all employees of firms of any size in the province of Alberta was \$633.43, and then beneath it you'll see a percentage, 2.82 percent, for January to January. Then if you look in February, it was \$638.02, so the percentage from February 2000 to February 1999 was 2.89 percent. In the month of March it was 3.25 percent. In the month of April it was 2.88

percent. Then in the month of May it was 4.22 percent. The difference between May of 2000 to May of 1999 was 4.22 percent. Then in June it was 3.82 percent. In July it was 3.51 percent. August was 3.85 percent. September, the last reporting period that we have, is 3.69.

Now, we're going to get October's, November's, December's, and then the statisticians will play with these things, do some reallocations internally, and about March I get the numbers for the year 2000. We then take the numbers, divide them by 12, and come up with a percentage. Last year you'll see for 1999 the figure of 1.13 percent. The way it's rolling right now, it's 3.19 percent, but it could go up or it could go down. So to ensure that there are enough dollars in here for April 1 of the year 2000, my recommendation for member remuneration adjustment is 4 percent. That's how I've calculated the 4 percent, and that's how it gets in here.

Now, if it's less than 4 percent, we don't get 4 percent. We get whatever it was. Last year we budgeted 2.25, and we ended up getting 1.13 percent. This year I want to make sure that the dollars are there for the provision, and it goes to 4 percent to make sure that we cover it. If it's above 4 percent, well, then nobody gets any more at this point in time until I come back to Members' Services and get some permission with respect to that.

Also attached to this sheet on the front page you'll see members' annual indemnities. This is at December of the year 2000. The source of this is the Prince Edward Island report of the Indemnities and Allowances Commission, which just reported a few days ago, on the first page of that. This is a listing of the 10 jurisdictions in Canada, with the salary levels of their MLAs for the base salary. Ontario has \$78,007; Quebec, \$75,706; B.C., \$71,000; Manitoba, \$61,519; Saskatchewan, \$61,322; Alberta, sixth at \$59,580; Newfoundland, \$59,352; New Brunswick, \$53,305; Nova Scotia, \$46,551; and P.E.I., currently at \$43,205.

Then the next category shows the known adjustments made in the year 2000. Now, there will be adjustments made between now and April 1 of 2001 for these jurisdictions as they go to their next fiscal year because we all follow the same, April to April. Newfoundland this year, in the year 2000, has a 2 percent increase in indemnity and a 4 percent increase in their allowances. Nova Scotia to this date has no changes made known to us. New Brunswick has a 1.8 percent increase. Quebec has a 4 percent increase. Ontario: at this point in time there's no change. However, they have before their Legislature right now a recommendation to move their salary from \$78,007 to \$110,945, a 42.2 percent increase, and that's just in their base. Manitoba is 3.8 percent. Saskatchewan has a 1.3 percent decrease because of the formula they use in Saskatchewan. Alberta had its 1.1 percent increase and British Columbia, a 1.5 percent increase. P.E.I., in the report of their indemnities commission – it's one person that the Premier appoints in P.E.I., and he came back and said that there would be a 2.5 percent increase.

So that's where we're at at the moment. That's the rationale, and that's the background for the 4 percent. If you'll permit me, just let me go through all of this, and then we'll come back to questions. Is that okay? So that's for the members, 4 percent.

For caucus budget adjustments, for the manpower in caucus budgets – and this is where each one of the caucuses gets an allocation for their caucus – as the Speaker all I see is one line. I have no idea how much money caucus people pay their staff. They can pay them \$300,000 or \$20,000. I don't know. Our tradition here is that the caucuses determine what it is. If they want to treat their employees with bigger raises or lower raises, that's not what I deal with. That's an internal caucus decision.

For caucuses and constituency services the manpower allocation

in there would be 4 percent as per the civil service agreements in the province of Alberta plus a potential fiscal pressure contingency of up to 3 percent, that we would distribute once we have a better knowledge of some of the parameters that go into this. In essence, you can almost look at 4 percent and 3 percent. These people that are in the caucuses and in the constituency offices are contract people, and the caucuses make their own decisions, as do the constituency offices make their own decisions, as to who those people are. It would be those numbers.

That is the same number for the next item, the Legislative Assembly Office salary adjustments: basically a 4 percent normal merit increase as per the public service grid plus 3 percent anticipated market adjustments as per the publicly announced province of Alberta public service negotiations and resolutions. We follow what the government has done with respect to this. The people in the LAO have to go through public competitions, follow grids and everything else, and follow the rules that we have in the LAO for them, consistently throughout the whole thing. Those are the same numbers in here, so in terms of the budget you've got those adjustments made.

The next item, dealing with the communication allowance. All members receive a certain allocation under communications, but you've all been telling me that the number of dollars you get in the communication allowance does not reflect the actual number of voters in the province of Alberta. Remember that our formula was based on the numbers of 1997. I said to you in the past that I had no way of knowing what the adjusted number of voters in Alberta was, until this fall when we had an enumeration in the province of Alberta. We've consulted with the Chief Electoral Officer, and he tells us there are 50,000 more electors in Alberta at this point in time than there were in 1997, but he also cautions that this enumeration will be subject to revision during the electoral period, when additional people who may have been missed come in, and those other adjustments are there.

At the moment what I've done is added an allocation figure for the communication allowance, not to see an increase in anybody's communication allowance but to reflect the increase of the 50,000. That amounts to \$31,000 for this whole budget, the communication budget provincewide, because of the way the allocation is. No increase in the per capita, just to reflect the number.

The next one, the transition allowance. We currently have our transition allowance, which this committee endorsed, and it basically is one provided to outgoing members or members who retire. We've had a situation here during this fiscal year where three members accessed the transition allowance. The three, as I recall, are Ms Barrett – or that may have been in the previous fiscal year – Mr. Day and Ms Olsen. All have accessed the transition allowance. So they can access it.

I do know at this point in time that under the current fiscal year ending March 31, if there were to be an election before March 31 of 2001, the only information I can deal with on transition allowances is that the numbers are that 15 or 16 current members of the Legislature declared publicly they are not seeking re-election. That's the number I have to go on in terms of dealing with this. So if you had 16 members doing this prior to March 31 – we currently have a budgeted number of \$2.1 million – we could probably make it, depending on the length of service that they have.

In here as well, as a result of this and as a result of the consultations we've had with the Auditor General and the recommendations of the Auditor General, the Auditor General says that we have to be very open with this, very transparent with this. So in this budget we have built in \$2.1 million for the year beginning

2001 and each of the years thereafter until we can build up a number, to respond to Mr. Gibbons' question, where if all 83 members were to leave today, prior to the end of March 31, if all were to be defeated or if all were to leave, the liability at March 31 is estimated at \$6.3 million. That means that in our current budget of \$2.1 million, well, nobody could get it, or two-thirds couldn't get it. But that's the maximum.

#### 10:50

What I want to do and what we have to do is follow through on the Auditor General's position. We have to be totally open, totally transparent, and build in the maximum case. If you had 83 members serving 12 years, this is what it would cost. It would be \$6.3 million at March 31. So the request in here is to put the \$2.1 million in as a stationary number, build it to that level in the parameters that we're all something – the bomb hit the building, and we're all gone – and basically that covers it. It deals with all the generally accepted accounting practices.

The next one for budgeting purposes in this budget. I put in a stationary number that we'll be sitting 85 days. This is the number we have in the current year, this is the number we had in the last year, and this is the number we have for next year. No increased number of days in sitting, the same stationary number.

Then the next two items are direct reflections of what we talked about at the last Members' Services meeting and the instruction given to me. Number one is that members indicated that in terms of what is available in their constituency offices, the 83 constituency offices in the province of Alberta, some equipment was available, some equipment was not available, and some equipment members had to go and get here, there, and everywhere. In the past we've had a very, very positive relationship with the department of what used to be known as public works, supply and services, and we would take surplus furniture from that particular department and basically move it into constituency offices. So we have all kinds of systems throughout the province of Alberta.

We've heard the discussion made by Mr. Wickman and others: gee, can't we even have a fax machine and a fax line? The security reviews that I've made of constituency offices tell me that some basic things that I thought MLAs would have in their offices, including telephones with that little screen on it that indicates what the number is of the person calling at the end of the line – most of them do not even have that. A few constituency offices have little buzzer systems that would be connected from the constituency assistant to a security force in the event that someone is in the office yelling, screaming, cajoling, or what have you. I've had one wired in my constituency office for 15 years, but I gather that a number do not.

So we built into this a furniture requirement to phase in in constituency offices certain furniture/equipment upgrades over three years. Basically, included in this budget is a request that we would deal with 83 offices dealing with fax machines, fax lines, voice mail, call display, and security systems at a budget number of \$2,200 times 83 and begin a phase-in and upgrade of constituency office furniture and equipment. You've got then the definition of what the member's office desking would be: desking system, credenza, hutch with doors, high-back executive chair, ergonomic chair. Then staff desking: two staff desking systems, overhead storage unit, and down the list it goes. We would begin the phase-in on April 1 of 2001 at a budgeted number of \$12,000 per constituency office and begin with the first of 30 after April 1, 2001. So that number is in there. Then on the next page you see that it includes a work/printer table and garbage cans.

Anyway, what I've had is all the constituency assistants at these

meetings in the spring and these meetings in the fall go through all of this and evaluate all of this along with the support staff of the LAO, and that's how we came to the cut. The original request was considerably higher than that in terms of dollars, but I arbitrarily cut it back because I think we can do it with that number in there.

The second item, then, in this budget has to do with technology and the technology needs of members. We have 83 members, from some who like using a typewriter to those who like using a palm reader. I can't force anybody to utilize any equipment if they don't want to or if they don't feel comfortable with it. What I have to respond to and what we have to respond to, I think, is the highest request made of members to be with it, whatever that phrase means in this particular time. So if a member says, "Look; I need a laptop," – and to this point in time if members want to have a laptop, they have to pay for it themselves. There's no provision for members to have laptops. They have to pay for it under some allocation.

We've got in here as number one, because of some areas of the province of Alberta or some technological gizmo, that we can enhance remote access to the RITE system; a request in here for laptops; reflecting and responding to the request made by various caucuses for increased printers; upgrading the cycle at which we renew the technology, the computers that we have, from a three-year cycle to a two-year cycle; and also then a response to look at developing technology that might be found in parliaments throughout the world. There are some that are very, very well advanced. Alberta is sort of like a midrange one. We're not anywhere near the top of the most sophisticated in terms of what is going on. So those dollars are put in there as well.

There is nothing else asked for in this budget than what I've already talked about this morning. There's nothing in here that goes to current members in their current positions. Everything kicks in April 1, 2001. Some of us may be here, and some of us may not be here. I think four members of this committee here this morning have already declared they're not running again, and the rest of us may not be here. So it has nothing to do with any of us. It has to do with the future of the parliament and the future of the system.

There are the budget parameters in a nutshell. I think I covered them all, including Mr. Gibbons' question.

Yes, Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Just a couple of points, Mr. Chairman. The first point. I've said it before and just, again, to have it on the record, because very likely this is my last meeting of Members' Services. When we look at the population of the various constituencies and the disparity, up to, I believe, in some cases now 50 percent, the argument that comes from the rural representatives is the geographical differences, you know, which is very, very legitimate. I can drive across my constituency in 10 minutes. Others would take hours and hours, in some cases even having to fly.

I've always maintained – and I know it's not going to happen in this budget – that somewhere down the road it should be addressed that rural representatives, particularly in the remote areas, have special needs. Some of them have five different constituency offices from what I understand, or they may be homes that staff work out of. Rather than the fixed formula that we tend to use, I think there's argument why some constituencies should be treated differently than others in terms of providing fiscal resources and other equipment. I can get by with one fax machine, but rural constituencies may need three because they may be located in three different points. So I sort of want that on the record.

The second point I was going to raise. When this budget is approved – and you mentioned April 1, 2001. Let's assume the Premier has consistently said that there'll be an election in March.

Does this budget that we approve go into effect April 1, 2001, if there's an election in March, or do you go back to the drawing board and sort of start all over?

THE CHAIRMAN: No. The intent would be that the budget would go in place, but the Legislative Assembly has to approve it ultimately. So the Legislative Assembly would have to meet.

The other thing that would happen is that this Members' Services Committee would cease to exist at the call of an election. So whatever that date is, this committee, this configuration would not be present anymore. The only person of continuity would be the Speaker. So let's just assume that the election were held, and if a similar result were as it is today, then presumably sometime in April or May the Legislature would come back, but there could not be a new Members' Services Committee appointed until the Legislature met and voted them in.

So what would be sitting in the background would be this budget that had already been done. The first thing that would happen is that there would have to be a new meeting of that Members' Services Committee, and this budget, whatever we decide today, would be brought to the attention of that Members' Services Committee, saying: "Well, look; this was done, openly and everything else. Do you want to endorse it, change it, or what have you?" The position if I were there would be: no, we'd better endorse it, subject to at least this base.

MR. WICKMAN: Which leads me to my question: are we better off, under those circumstances, dealing with this particular budget line by line or simply on a global basis? It basically becomes a framework for the next Legislative Assembly. When I say globally, I mean, you know, that we go to the initial page which shows the amounts for each different department and raise questions there and then just approve the budget on a global basis rather than line by line.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's a decision of the committee.

11:00

MR. WOLOSHYN: I endorse that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other comments?

MRS. SLOAN: Well, I have questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, there'll be opportunity. As I understand, you want to go section by section.

MR. WICKMAN: Department by department rather than line by line but then one motion to sort of adopt the whole budget on a global basis.

THE CHAIRMAN: That'd be fine. If there's any misunderstanding, I'll stop and go back to make sure there's maximum opportunity for members to participate. Okay?

Well, if you go then to the estimates summary, you'll see in the book that there are several pages in there. The first one is what the profile would look like in the whole thing, and then you flip it over to the second page, where I think I've tried to respond to your advice of previous meetings. It's a white page that has a green line at the top, and it has little red type on one side. You said: make it clear so we can follow where the variances are. So in a very macro kind of way, if you look at these various divisions – for financial management and administrative services the request is for \$482,000. Last year's budget was \$436,418. The variance is \$45,582. The human resource component – that is that 4 plus 3 percent, the 7

percent – amounts to \$42,052. Then you see a little footnote 2 at the bottom that says, "Normal merit and anticipated market adjustments, \$14,000 additional wages for [constituency] office furniture/equipment project." That explains what happens in that line.

The second line, human resources services, shows a variance of \$30,753, but the human resource component is \$26,003. The footnote basically says, "Normal merit and anticipated market adjustments."

The one that you always, always want to spend a great deal of time on, the Speaker's office, shows \$334,000 with a budget before of \$314,403. The variance is \$19,597. The human resource component is \$17,697. The footnote shows that.

For the public information branch you go right across again. This is the first of the operational variances. The first three sections basically deal with those manpower things. In this case, the public information branch, there is \$74,970 for the operational component, \$10,000 for the increased publications demand, and \$10,000 for the interpretive centre maintenance. Because of the way the government is dealing now, it's saying to all of its various departments and agencies: you must budget internally for the cost of maintenance. In the past Alberta Infrastructure through Alberta public works, supply and services used to take care of the maintenance people at the interpretive centre on the north side. Well, now we have to take care of it, so we have to budget for it. So it becomes open and transparent. Then \$54,000 for increased printing costs, increased TV charges – that is for the people who come in and do the coverage – and Youth Parliament support.

The next one is the library. You see that the human resource component is \$61,218. The operational component is \$56,850: \$20,000 for electronic support, completion of the newsfeed project; and their membership fees and a couple of things have gone up. Most interesting about the library is that we're now experiencing a decrease in revenues because of the printed *Hansard*, but we're getting increased costs because we've gone on-line. You can now access everything that goes on in this Assembly on the Internet, on-line. *Hansard* is published, all the Orders of the Day. Everything else can be accessed on-line. So we are getting increased usage by the library and other places like that, and we're getting a decrease in revenue from the print copy of the sale of the *Hansard*, which I guess is the way of the future, maybe to a certain degree.

House services. You can see the human resource component, and then you can see the operational component. The red line says, "\$175,000 – hosting of the 40th Regional Canadian Conference."

Information services. You can see the human resources component and the \$486,200 that now deals with some of those technological changes: the \$40,000 identified a little earlier for remote access, \$180,000 for laptops for members, \$150,000 for increased upgrade cycle, \$50,000 for new and developing technologies, \$18,000 for increased caucus printer allocations. Oh, yeah. There's another conference of administrators. I'd encourage, from a morale, professional development thing, having the officials in the LAO take a lead in organizing crossbreeding across the country so that everybody is current.

AN HON. MEMBER: Crossbreeding?

THE CHAIRMAN: That's right. Crossbreeding, cross-fertilization. It's a very lucrative word in the environment.

Then the next one, committees. These are all the committees of the Legislative Assembly. I think the figure for the committee that Mrs. Sloan talked about shows zero dollars. In contacting the chairman, he said that he didn't anticipate any meetings, so that's

why the zero budget for that one. One committee did have newspaper advertisements. I think the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee did, something like \$85,000 or something like that advertising the heritage savings trust fund. Okay; well, they made that decision. It's an all-party committee. You're all there. I'm not on it. I'm just responding to those budgets.

Then you get MLA administration. That includes the constituency offices, including MLAs and everybody else. You can see the human resource variants. That's not the amount for MLAs. That includes all of these other offices and people as well. Then you see the operational component of \$655,822 for the increased services to constituency offices. That was 30 offices at \$12,000 per year for \$360,000, \$215,000 for those fax machines and security systems, and for the increase of 50,000 in the electoral base. Basically, in a nutshell, that's that profile.

If you look at the next page, you can see the three-year business plan, as you requested me to do, punching out for the next three years. There are two parameters in here. For the projections in subsequent years only two definitions were used: 7 percent for human resources and 2 percent as an operational inflation factor where appropriate. Those are the only two numbers that are used in here for these numbers. Nothing else is built in. There's no new program, no new expenditure other than those two items.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the overview of the parameters. The rest then kicks in to each of these various sections in a microapproach.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I have a question. This information that you circulated on the average annual earnings is very helpful. I think you took this information from a P.E.I. report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, I did.

DR. PANNU: It gives us, I think, useful comparisons across the provinces with respect to MLA compensation. Do these numbers include every dollar that MLAs receive in any form? Do these include any tax exemptions, part of remuneration that might be tax exempted, or don't they?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, what they are are global figures. Here's the P.E.I. report. Just take Newfoundland as an example. Well, no. First of all, look at the Alberta one. Look at the Alberta one first of all. Alberta's is \$59,580. That component is made up of the taxable portion of \$39,720 and the nontaxable portion of \$19,860. Okay? The Newfoundland number is \$59,352. The taxable portion is \$39,568. The nontaxable is \$19,784. New Brunswick's is \$53,305. Their taxable portion is \$38,075. Their nontaxable is \$15,230. For P.E.I. it says \$43,205. They're at \$33,155 for taxable and for nontaxable, \$10,050. I've missed some others. There are a number of others in here. This is the base salary for members, Dr. Pannu.

Now, to answer your question for the other ones, no, it doesn't ask everything else. As an example, in Ontario, where they get a salary of \$78,000, they have no nontaxable portion. However, they have an RRSP contribution of 50 percent, the contribution of a member to an RRSP program, and in addition to the re-establishment allowance, they also have an outgoing member's consultation allowance of \$7,000 so that they can go and consult with professionals, accountants, lawyers, about re-establishing themselves. You get a whole variety of things in here. So the answer to your question is no, this is just the base. If you added the rest, you'd have a tremendous variety of different things.

*11:10*

DR. PANNU: There is, then, some comparability across the

provinces that you just mentioned because they have the same sort of thing that we do in terms of part of the remuneration.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. In fact, seven of these 10 have a nontaxable allowance like Alberta. Only three do not.

DR. PANNU: With respect to Ontario, I just want to have one further question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

DR. PANNU: You mentioned the RRSP provision there. You said that it's 50 percent. Is it a contributory scheme, then, where 50 percent of the RRSP . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, as an example, in Ontario if you took – what is it? – 13 and a half percent of their \$78,000 . . . Is it 18.5 percent? What are you allowed to contribute for RRSPs? None of us can because none of us are at the maximum.

AN HON. MEMBER: Eighteen and a half.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is that \$13,500? So in Ontario the individual would do \$6,750, and their LAO would do the other \$6,750. So that would be the contribution they have. We don't have that.

DR. PANNU: Good. That answers my question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Now, that's the current thing for Ontario. I think this new provision, the 42 percent increase, is being passed as we sit.

Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Just one more comment here on page 3, your projected budget estimates. I don't want the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to take this personally, but when I look at the caucus services budgets, it's always kind of bugged me when we see two members in the New Democrat caucus getting \$131,500 apiece in terms of caucus services. Yet for the Official Opposition, when you break it down per member, it works out to \$75,000 per caucus member. So there's that disparity there that the third party, even though it's not an official third party, is being treated much more favourably than the Official Opposition.

THE CHAIRMAN: We can come to all of those when we deal with those specific sections, if that's okay.

Do you want to move on, then, to the first one, financial management?

MR. JACQUES: I just wanted to make an observation, and I realize this committee is not going to be dealing with MLA remuneration in any sense or form. The handout that you gave again illustrates the difficulty with regards to the province of Alberta not having an MLA pension plan, which is fine. The point is that on the registered retirement savings plans you're restricted to that taxable portion only – i.e., the \$37,000, in round numbers – so that effectively a member cannot really contribute to the max had the amount been deemed to be an entirely taxable amount. I know that raises another question because theoretically, then, the gross amount would have to be greater if you want to get the same after-tax dollars, but I think it's something that future members are going to have to deal with.

I would suggest that at the next session the members of the new committee reflect back on these minutes perhaps, maybe refresh the

memory of some of the items that might be brought up. I think that's one item that should be given serious consideration very early in the new Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Additional comments from members before we proceed then?

All right. If you flip over, then, to the first section called financial management and administrative services and if you follow that variance sheet, the one with the red printing on it – if you sort of just pulled it out and followed it, it would be very, very easy to follow. Under this section, financial management and administrative services, we've broken it down. This request is for that number, \$45,582, and then you have the two components, the human resources component of \$42,052, which means that we're dealing with that parameter of the 4 and the 3, and then an operational increase of \$3,530, completely identified down to \$200 items that are in there. Then you see the sheet that basically looks at their specific budget: same manpower, same staffing, and a request is there. I've gone through it half a dozen times with the people. It's bare bones, and I'd like to recommend it, but somebody would have to move it if we want to go on a section-by-section basis.

MRS. SLOAN: This is a general question that relates to the proposed adjustments for management and nonmanagement. When I look at the proposed adjustments in this area, financial management and administration, the bulk of them are within the nonmanagement category, but if we look throughout some of the other service departments of LAO, you'll see that it fluctuates quite significantly. As an example, in the Speaker's office, the management increases are significantly more than the nonmanagement. So I'm wondering how the decisions were made relative to the division between management and nonmanagement. Was it simply based on the number of staff and their tenure, or how did those determinations come about?

DR. McNEIL: Just application of the 4 and 3 percent to the manpower dollars that were allocated in those categories in most instances. In other words, some units of the LAO have a preponderance of management in those areas, and others have more nonmanagement. It's just an application of the percentages to those previous year's numbers, except in a couple of instances where there was an issue of reclassification as a part of the management review that took place last year that resulted in certain managers receiving increases above that because of equity considerations in the marketplace and so on and the fact that reclassification determined that those positions were not classified appropriately. Those were minor compared to the end case for 4 and 3.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Very specifically, in the overview of the Speaker's office, if you were to just look through the Speaker's office – Mrs. Sloan raised it – it says: earnings – management, \$8,700. There are two people in that category. Earnings – nonmanagement: \$2,769. There is one person. So managers don't get \$8,700; there are the two of them. They happen to have been there for 20 years' service and 15 years' service, whereas the nonmanagement one is only a relatively new employee. She's not making the same amount of money. But the more telling thing is: pay to Members of the Legislative Assembly, \$1,688. There is only one MLA in the Speaker's office. The managers are under that 4 and 3 provision because of where they're at, and the nonmanagement, and then it's compared to the other one.

So the number – you know, you have to look to see how many

employees there are in that category, too, and how many years they have and where they're at on the grid and all the rest of that.

MRS. SLOAN: If I could just ask a subsequent question, then, on that same point. Just taking what you've said then, Mr. Clerk, in regard to that, in comparing information systems with House services, they're significantly nonmanagement, \$129,000 compared to \$5,000 for management. In House services it was much closer together, \$41,000 to nonmanagement and \$31,000 to management.

In information systems I recall that when we discussed the estimates a year ago, there was a high level of concern about our ability to keep good people or qualified people in information systems and also to be able to pay them at a level that was competitive within their field. I would assume that that speaks to the management of information systems as well. Again, is it simply a matter of tenure and numbers?

11:20

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. I guess the number of positions this year has an effect.

MR. GANO: Added positions.

DR. McNEIL: There's one management position, and in nonmanagement there are two additional positions in information systems that are included in that \$129,000.

THE CHAIRMAN: Specifically to your question about are we able to be competitive in salaries, the answer is no, but we're making very good efforts by professional development, encouragement, pats on the back, and all those other things. But there's no way in the world – if somebody walks in and says, "I've got a job in Calgary making \$75,000 a year, and you're paying me \$40,000; can you give me \$75,000?" the answer is no. The answer is no, we can't. But it's been pretty good. I think we only lost – what? – one person in that area this year, and it was a person who moved to Calgary. With the people we've got, the morale is high, the morale is good, and productivity is – this is an area of tremendous improvement in the three years that I've been the Speaker, but it's through the morale side rather than financial distribution.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. How would you like to proceed then? There's the overview of the first one. Do you want to go through them all and then come back with one major decision, or do you want to deal with them one at a time?

MR. WOLOSHYN: All put into one, I'd suggest, at the end of the meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. So are there any further questions, then, on the first one, financial management and administrative services?

Then the second section, human resource services. Six people are involved in this particular one. They look after, of course, all of the human resource services, which is self-explanatory, I guess. You're looking at the human resource component and the operational component, and I'd be happy to answer any questions if you have any.

Okay. Then if that's fine, we'll move on to the Speaker's office, which always seems to take three hours of a three hour and 15 minute meeting.

MS HALEY: You'd better stop whining, you know.

THE CHAIRMAN: Whining? I'm used to whining. It's all I ever do. It's my annual whining session.

So there it is, a big organization of three staff people.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Let's reduce it by \$1,688.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

MRS. SLOAN: Can I ask a question that's in relation to that? As the Speaker is aware, this year there was another bit of controversy surrounding the laying of wreaths by members at Remembrance Day services. You assisted greatly in resolving that matter, but I'm wondering. Currently the way in which that matter is financed and dealt with – you can correct me if I'm wrong – it goes through protocol. Because there have been some variances in I guess the wreaths being provided and to which members they're provided covered under protocol, would there ever be any consideration of having the LAO cover wreaths for members so that each member of this Legislature is afforded equal treatment?

THE CHAIRMAN: What Mrs. Sloan is referring to is a situation with Remembrance Day ceremonies. The protocol office, which is associated with the government, not the Legislative Assembly, over the years has developed a working relationship with the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, who advises the protocol office where there'll be cenotaphs and where there'll be Remembrance Day ceremonies. The protocol office then advises individual Members of the Legislative Assembly that if they would like to lay a wreath at a particular point, the wreath will be sent, and it works with no problems whatsoever until you come to a large urban area like Edmonton.

In a rural constituency – and I'll just speak for myself. I'll go to five Remembrance Day ceremonies in five different communities on that day, and there'll be a government of Alberta wreath at each one of them. There's only one MLA, though, attending. In Edmonton if you had one major function at the Butterdome and 20 MLAs all came up, each one wanting to lay a wreath, the advice that seems to have come back from the organizers is that that is a little too much for the program. I'm trying to be really delicate here. There's usually one person designated to do it, so another member says, "Well, I wanted to go and do that." It's one of those little items that I want to try and find a more positive resolution to than we have in the past. So if it turns out that there are 20 MLAs going to the Butterdome, how do 20 MLAs go and participate in the laying of the wreath, rather than just one on their behalf?

MRS. SLOAN: I think the principle that has to be followed is where the ceremony is occurring. If the ceremonies are occurring within the boundaries of a member's constituency – I mean, I most certainly am going to go to the Butterdome, which is in my constituency, versus the downtown ceremony or a ceremony that might be held at another Legion. Clearly, I think it has to be determined by: who is the resident MLA? I mean, what has occurred is that the government has taken responsibility and, using my constituency as an example, would come and would lay wreaths for both the government and the Members of the Legislative Assembly. It wouldn't matter that I'm sitting there as the recognized resident MLA for that area. So, to me, in order for fair treatment to occur for all members, either protocol has to modify their operations and designations in this area or the LAO needs to assume responsibility for doing it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I appreciate what you're saying, and I appreciate

that we did make some progress this year. I think it's a very dignified situation. It has to be dealt with with dignity, and it has to be dealt with with dignity on the basis of the elected representative in that area. Unfortunately, in the past sometimes the organizers have said, "No, we want this person to provide it," and that becomes a very delicate situation for me to try and deal with. Right now the LAO is not involved. They may very well be. We're going to have some more discussions with the protocol people to deal with this kind of a situation.

MRS. SLOAN: Might I suggest that there might even be the possibility that the government member and the resident member could lay the wreath together?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I agree.

MRS. SLOAN: That's a solution.

THE CHAIRMAN: I have no problem with that at all. I mean, if the wreath says "Government of Alberta" or "Legislative Assembly of Alberta," then it's very easy to deal with. It's not a problem for most of us because there's only one of us in that area. It's only in the urban centres where there's a multiplicity of members. I'm sure we can work it out.

By the way, the protocol people have no difficulty in wanting to work it out either. They want to work it out.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, let me state for the record that their comments made at the ceremony this year were contradictory to that statement.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry to hear that.

MRS. SLOAN: So just let me state that there is a problem in that area.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we will try and deal with it to maximize the appearance of the MLA.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further on the Speaker's office?

MRS. SLOAN: No.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I just want to comment on some of the reaction I've had on some of the new initiatives that have been taken by your office. There's quite a number, but two in particular I received very favourable comment on. One is the Youth Parliament, where grade 10 students hold a mock session, and they actually vote and throw out the government or whatever. That's extremely beneficial to the young people and extremely enjoyable.

The other – I don't believe it was done in the past – is where constituency staff and I believe Legislature staff are invited for a supper. Last year both my constituency staff members received a 10-year service pin. The comments I heard there again were very favourable, that they feel part of the system when that type of thing happens.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I very much appreciate that. There are 83 constituency offices, and at the event last Thursday night there was representation from 40, so there are still 43 out there. I know some of them can't come every year – the weather and all the rest of that – but I hope to maximize that in the future. Thank you.

The public information branch. You can see the breakdown and the human resource component. Manpowerwise this is 25.6 people.

Clerk, do you have a number as to how many hits we get on that web site that we have? Is that the right terminology: how many hits do you get and how many people tune in?

11:30

MR. GANO: That's the right terminology. I don't have it available. It's increasing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Give me a guess.

MR. GANO: The last number that I can recall was in the order of 3,000 per day, and that was during the last session.

THE CHAIRMAN: Three thousand per day? I don't know if that's good or bad.

Mr. Herard, you're pretty up to date on this sort of stuff.

MR. HERARD: Well, it's 3,000 more that can do it that couldn't do it before. It's an improvement in communication with the people of the province, I would think, so it's good.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have some guy from Denmark who keeps sending e-mails when he tunes in on-line to listen to the Alberta Legislative Assembly and he's disappointed because it's not on-line. We have to turn back to him and say that we sit at certain hours, that we don't go 24 hours a day. Whoever he is, he's having a good life, I guess.

The Legislature Library. I get positive comments from members about responses they get from the library, and I don't believe that we've had any negatives in that area in the last year.

MRS. SLOAN: Just a question, though, in relation to the microfilming. That estimation seems low if you were planning to do all the microfilming pre-1955.

THE CHAIRMAN: We've been doing this project for decades, so it's a little bit easier.

MRS. SLOAN: So that's just an annual allocation?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. It's a little bit each year.

MRS. SLOAN: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's just an ongoing thing.

Okay. House services then. You've got the manpower component with respect to that one. This is 18 people, and this is the one that also includes the \$151,000 for the hosting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Canadian Regional Conference in July 2001. The last time we did it was 1989. It's our turn again in 2001. It would be the third week of July. It'll be in Edmonton. When it was done in 1989, it was done in two venues – three or four days in Calgary and three or four days in Edmonton – and there was a pretty expensive transportation allocation associated with it. This year it's in one place, Edmonton. I'm not sure if that's the beginning of Klondike Days or the tail end of the Calgary Stampede, but it's just in that time frame.

It'll be professional development, and we'll have a number of speakers, with focus on MLAs and other people as well. We're working on the agenda. First thing that will be done is that we're sending out letters to all elected people in the country asking if they want to make a paper presentation in the Assembly. We'll see what

that response is. Then we may go beyond that and just get a few other interesting, different speakers. One I was thinking of doing – the state of Oregon has gone to mail-in ballots for elections.

MS HALEY: Go figure.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go figure. Okay. They all claim that it's very successful. It might be interesting to have the chief electoral officer of Oregon come up and just give a little paper. I'm just saying that these are all tentative. We're open for ideas.

I was at a conference in Halifax where a member of the Nova Scotia Legislature who is a theologian and an author has written books on the subject of politics and religion. There were about 80 of us in the room, and our first response was, "Well, let's just watch this one go," but it turned out to be an absolutely invigorating and lively one-and-a-half-hour discussion. He made it very current in terms of virtually all the leaders we have today, known by all people, how they fit in and how they didn't fit in. We were all really hesitant about it; no one wanted to get close to this subject at first. He was a wonderful speaker, and he's a member of the Nova Scotia Legislature. So I don't know if he'd be one of the delegates coming to Alberta in 2001, but it was a very fascinating discussion.

Questions?

Okay. Then the next section: information systems services. This is the area where we respond in terms of what requests were made. You can see the human resources component, and then you can see the operational expense component, including the dollars that we talked about earlier for the printers in caucus offices, the upgrade cycle, the laptop project, and the developing technologies.

You also have in this section the breakdown of the decision item that I had your representatives from each of the caucuses work on in the last number of months. This all comes about as a result of the meetings – Bill, you chaired them in concert with representatives from the caucuses and worked through meeting after meeting after meeting with them. I do believe that we've got the concerns identified, and this will be very helpful.

Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Yeah. I wanted to thank Mr. Gano and yourself for taking the time to not only listen to what our concerns were, particularly with regard to information systems but also with regard to our constituency access. An example that you've responded to in here – there are days in Airdrie when we can spend the majority of the day trying to connect with the RITE line so we can get our e-mail. It has happened frequently that we couldn't access until after 4 o'clock, when perhaps some people in this area are shutting down their computers for the day and we could finally get our e-mail off-line.

I guess I wanted to say from an MLA point of view that dealing with things like a laptop computer, information systems has been marvelous to deal with when it comes to keeping our computer going. It's imperative that we recognize that even as recently as seven years ago, the vast majority of MLAs did not have anything to do with a computer. We've rapidly surpassed the 50 percent mark now of MLAs themselves being on-line, not just their office staff. It is an extraordinary wave of the future that's hitting us, and I'm very grateful to see the recognition of the members' needs reflected in these numbers.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I again want to compliment you and everyone else who has had anything to do with the preparation of the budget. I only have one question, and that is on the data processing equipment, the last item in there. The change to the two-year cycle

from three years: there's \$150,000, I guess, related to that project. I wonder if that's something that should receive a little more scrutiny in the sense of memory upgrades. You know, by adding a chip or two, I think the existing equipment can perhaps be updated, and we can avoid much of the additional cost that's indicated here. Is that alternative feasible?

THE CHAIRMAN: Bill, any comment?

MR. GANO: Yes, that is a feasible alternative for machines that are fairly new. The problem that we run into is that for machines that are older than two years, yes, upgrades are available, but the software is also increasing at the same rate. Although you may be able to upgrade the hardware, the software doesn't necessarily take advantage of those upgrades.

The other issue, as we move more and more toward the use of laptops, is that laptops are not as upgradable as desktop machines. As a result, the cycle on those has to be a little quicker as well. It's kind of a trade-off. We do look at whether that machine can be upgraded or not, and we do use the most cost-effective method, but at the rate that the software is changing, we need to move to a faster upgrade cycle.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. Mr. Chairman, information systems services is a department that finally gets the hit it deserves in terms of a budget increase. I remember that last year the Member for Edmonton-Riverview in particular put up a fight for recognition of this particular department, to no avail. This year it appears that a lot of the shortcomings that were identified last year have been corrected. Without information systems services, constituency offices would have an extremely difficult time even functioning. So this is very much appreciated, and I would hope it's supported by all.

11:40

MR. GIBBONS: Starting in April, when we start getting laptops for the members, are you going to come out with a list of one or two, the only ones that are to be purchased, and not get into the position where people have to take over laptops that are not compatible?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm going to be very decisive about this. One of the problems in the past in terms of the frustration of members was that members would go out and buy equipment because they got a good deal on it. You know, a friend recommended it. They paid for it from whatever source. Then immediately they brought it to wherever they were, and the first thing they did was phone up and say: "Can you come over here and install it? Can you take out all the bugs?" Well, we've got a small number of people with only so much expertise; they can't know everything. If you take somebody and he spends two, three, four, five days trying to debug somebody's thing, that we think is a piece of junk but they got it because it was a hot deal and they believe in it, we've got a problem.

So we have to find some degree of consistency. I'm going to be very, very determined and very, very firm about that. If we want to maximize the backup people that we have, then we have to recognize that we have to have some degree of uniformity with respect to this.

MR. GIBBONS: I'd like to say that I totally agree, because I just happened to take over an office that did not have one that was compatible.

MRS. SLOAN: Just to seek clarification on the printer allocations, whether or not that will issue a standard colour printer to constituencies.

THE CHAIRMAN: The printers here deal with caucuses, I think.

MRS. SLOAN: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is in response to the caucuses, the development of that.

Bill, do we have colour printers in constituency offices? Is that the standard package?

MR. GANO: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: I didn't think we did. No.

MR. GANO: In terms of the dollar amounts there, those dollars could address colour printers if that was a need within a caucus office. We do have a colour printer within the Legislative Assembly Office now that is available to all caucuses for their use. It's a central colour printer, but if a caucus determined that they needed one, then the dollars that are there would address one colour printer.

THE CHAIRMAN: In a caucus.

MR. GANO: In a caucus.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is not constituency offices. We haven't moved that far yet.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, I would state in contrast that over the course of my term I think we actually requested at one point if we could purchase a colour printer, because many of the posters, whether it was in regards to schools or if we were doing an open house, we were doing in-house. What I would do is take them home and print them off on a colour printer so that we had the standard. It may be that other members choose to take their printing out, but I think the capability exists for a lot of material that's done on a promotion or public – invitations could be done in-house by members if that capability existed. I know that within the opposition caucus there is a colour printer, which has produced in-house a variety of different items. So I think it's becoming more of a standard requirement than perhaps it was in the past.

THE CHAIRMAN: In our proposal here we haven't built in colour printers for constituency offices.

MR. GANO: Not specifically. The cost is there if the need were there.

THE CHAIRMAN: But we haven't dealt with that.

MR. GANO: That's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, we'll review it and see what we can do in the future. How's that? Unless you want to make a decision and add more dollars for whatever the heck it is.

MS HALEY: I would not want to add more dollars, Mr. Chairman, but I do believe that the cost of colour printers has drastically been reduced. Their operating costs are slightly higher, but the actual cost of the physical machine is not that high. I guess there's always the potential inside an individual caucus budget to purchase an

additional machine.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's there. It's there now, but I was going back to the constituency offices. Then I'd flip that out 83 times. For caucus offices I can quickly multiply by three, but for constituency offices, that's it.

MS HALEY: It would be like the faxes, Mr. Chairman. For the last 20 years we've been buying our own, so we could probably do that too.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll maximize the delivery, Mme Haley. We'll do the very best we can do.

Anything further in that section, hon. members?

The next section, then, is the committees branch. These are all the committees of the Legislative Assembly. These are all the standing committees, with their budgets in there. I think there was an updated sheet brought this morning because there were a couple of committees that had zero dollars in them, three of them in fact. These dollars are provided to us by the chairmen of these various committees.

MRS. SLOAN: I had a question specifically about the Leg. Offices estimate. Because of my knowledge of the offices that exist under that committee – the provincial Ombudsman, the Auditor General, and the Chief Electoral Officer – and specifically the Auditor General and the provincial Ombudsman, my understanding is that the jurisdiction of the provincial Ombudsman may increase by over 50 percent if the responsibilities of his office expand to include the health professions and the regional health authorities. I was just looking at what we're proposing. It's a slight increase. I'm wondering whether or not that increase is actually reflective of the increase in operations that members are going to be responsible for reviewing in that area.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is anybody in this room a member of the Leg. Offices Committee? Okay, then, Mr. Jacques. You're the only spokesman we can have. This was provided to us by the chairman on behalf of the committee for their budget.

MR. JACQUES: Well, in terms of the requisitions that the Legislature officers are going to be requesting, they have not been dealt with at this point. There is a meeting of Leg. Offices on Thursday, and at that point in time we'll be dealing with the proposed estimates of each of them, if that was the question. I gather you were talking in a broader sense, vis-a-vis the actual committee itself.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, the expansion of at least two of the offices that fall under that committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't think that's correct. There should be only the four officers of the Legislative Assembly that should be reporting to the Legislative Offices Committee. There are only four.

MR. JACQUES: Five.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Five. Well, four people and five offices. Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: There is also a proposal that the Children's Advocate be made independent, which would bring that under that. Again, that's a proposal that's been made and is before the government. I'm just wondering whether or not the increase that's

factored within there, if an additional office was incorporated for the Children's Advocate plus the expansion of the two offices I spoke of earlier, is going to be sufficient to cover off if the committee needs additional meetings or additional support.

THE CHAIRMAN: No one in this room can answer that. These numbers are not numbers that myself or the Clerk or anybody else created. These are numbers from the chairmen of these committees. So at the moment this is what the chairmen have informed us they need.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

11:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Anything further in that area?

The next section, MLA administration. You can see the human resource expense, which includes everything under that 4 percent item. You know what? We had a CPP increase, we had an LTDI increase, and we had a WCB decrease. Our dental group, life insurance, Alberta health care, extended health care, and extended benefits plans had small increases, and that's all part of the whole thing again.

Then you get under the operational side. You'll see the \$474,000 for the offices that we talked about: the fax machines, security lines, and the 30 constituency office upgrades. The other dollars are all in there.

It seems that according to the number of electors, we have moved from 1,763,000 to 1,812,000. Even in the number of days since I put this figure out and got it from him, a number of you have commented to me that that simply can't be right, that there have to be more electors in Alberta. As I said, subject to what he said, that was his first cut, and they have to do the refinement and what have you. We did have an enumeration in Alberta, unlike what Elections Canada did in the recent federal election. They essentially used, I guess, an income tax base. We've got an enumeration, so we'll get these numbers, and we'll be able to deal with it.

You've got a document in there as well about the furniture, office equipment, computer services surveys, the results of the surveys we had, the consultation, a breakdown in terms of draft constituency office furniture and equipment lists, and a valuation, then, about ratings of the various offices, everything from coffee tables to garbage cans.

Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Two points under the MLA administration. Last year myself and my colleagues made a concentrated effort to get recognition for the difficulties we have in retaining good staff when the market becomes very competitive, as it is right now. We do see again a real disparity between the wage increases and such for staff of, let's say, the Legislative Assembly as opposed to caucus staff. I know the arguments are there that we can pay them whatever we want to out of our budgets, but the budgets simply aren't sufficient to recognize that those staff members, if they're to be retained and to treat them fairly, have to be given the same consideration as to not only merit increases but also the normal increases achieved under collective agreements and so on and so forth. So that's the one point that somewhere along the line I think we have to recognize. I know there's some resistance from the government caucus to recognize that, but I think it's very, very important.

Again, I'm not sure if this point will be addressed. In earlier remarks the question of the third-party caucus allowance being treated differently . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: That'll come later. Go to that section. In there under Members' Services Allowances, on the second page, under the overview, it says: constituency office element. Okay. Now we're talking about the constituency office element. There are three components that go into constituency office budgets that each member gets. They get one thing called a constituency office allocation. Then you get a communication allocation, depending on the number of electors you have. Then you get a small promotional element. The three of them go together, and that punches out what it is you get. I think that of the total of all those things for constituency offices in Alberta, probably the minimum is about – what? – \$52,000, \$53,000. The maximum is about \$66,000, \$67,000, \$68,000. So depending on the number of people there are in a constituency, you fit into one of those categories.

Under the constituency office element it says, "increase in per office amount from \$44,610 to \$46,400." That's an increase of 4 percent. Now, I also said that we have to review and add an additional 3 percent. So, Mr. Wickman, in essence there will be approximately a 7 percent increase on that side, to deal with your specific.

Now, what I don't have a good handle on, because of the way we deal with this, is that everybody in the system pays their offices different salaries, and that's the right all members have wanted. Some members want to have volunteers. They don't pay anybody anything. The people who come in and work in their offices are volunteers. Some other people pay their constituency office staff person up to \$40,000 a year. Some pay them on an hourly basis. We have all these variances, and you've always said and all the members have said: stay out of this; stay out of this; stay out of this. So I have kind of a little difficulty specifically responding to the question unless we deal with this in a uniform way, and I don't think anybody wants to. I don't think anybody wants to.

So the response to your question, Mr. Wickman, is that all members will get an increase in the constituency office element. There is no increase in the communication element and basically no increase in the promotional element, or if there is, it's very little. That will show about a 7 percent thing where you can deal with manpower. I have no idea how much your manpower component is in your office. I don't know if you're paying \$20,000 in rent and \$20,000 per person, but it's your right to do whatever you want to do.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anybody else?

MRS. SLOAN: Can I just clarify? Where is the additional 3 percent coming from?

THE CHAIRMAN: Under the fiscal contingency, under the first bullet. It's on the first page of the budget, at the bottom, if you go back to the first page. It's one that we allocate. It's under the potential fiscal pressure contingency of \$350,000. It will come. Remember that these people are all under contracts, and there are tremendous variances. It's not an easy number to allocate at this point in time.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, that is applicable only to one of the three elements in this; that is, the constituency office element.

THE CHAIRMAN: And caucus.

DR. PANNU: And caucus?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Constituency and caucus, because they're all under contract.

Any other questions with respect to this area?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, the point should be made, though, that the additional 3 percent you talk about pertains to the outcome of any bargaining, so it's not a given that that 3 percent is going to be there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think the bargaining has been done.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, is the bargaining all done?

THE CHAIRMAN: In this case it's been done.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. We're always following in this area. We don't lead; we follow.

Hon. members, it's two minutes to 12. We said that we would terminate at 12. Do you want to just continue and wrap this up before you break? Does everybody agree to that?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The next section, then, is government members. Now, this is based very, very, very simply. Again, the allocation for each member in a caucus is based on – this current one is \$46,743. It was increased by 4 percent. Rounded off, that's \$49,000. So in the case of the government members they had no input in this at all. I just applied the formula that we have. They have one additional member. Again, in the current environment that we're in, the current government caucus as it is today has one more private member in it now than it did on April 1 of 2000. Mr. Day left. Mrs. Jablonski came in. She's a private member, not an Executive Council member. So the only thing that you see in the government budget is the 4 percent allocated plus the allocation of one additional \$49,000 to make up for that member. That's what it is. The formula applies evenly to the other two caucuses as well.

The Official Opposition caucus. Again, the number went down by one. As we sit today, the number has reduced itself by one in this current year because Ms Olsen left, so in building this thing, it's based on the current number that's in there for the Official Opposition members' allowance. The leader's office allowance was adjusted by that 4 percent and the Calgary caucus office by the 4 percent again, and that's how you get the number.

In the New Democratic opposition exactly the same thing. We had a situation during this year where Ms Barrett left. There was a period of time before the new member came in. So it's based on the two members plus the leader's office allocation with the formula that we have, that's in place, and it shows an adjustment number that's in there.

We should go on to the independent. Because we have one independent member, we have another budget line. This reflects the position of Ms Paul. She's an independent member. She says that she's not running. In terms of budgeting for next year, I have no idea where that position is going to be, so we show it that way.

In the last one we have a vacancy. Ms Olsen's seat is vacant, so that just shows under a category of vacancy. What will happen is that when the air is cleared and everybody comes back, then these numbers will simply be allocated under the formula that we have. No discussion.

12:00

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I've heard twice during this meeting some concern from Mr. Wickman with respect to the New Democrat caucus budget. With your permission I'd just like to make some observations on it. The budget of the New Democrat caucus was the result of a decision made by this committee, in its wisdom, over three years ago. According to that decision, the New Democrat budget was determined to have two elements. One is of course the per member allowance, which is the same as for every other caucus. The second element has to do with the allocation of funds related to the leader's allowance.

This committee made a decision three and a half years ago or so to allocate to the New Democrat caucus half of the amount received by the Leader of the Official Opposition. So the budget we have before us is based on the decision of this committee.

The changes in the size of caucuses take place over a period of time, during the duration of the life of a particular Assembly. I notice that the Liberal caucus size has shrunk over the years, but that hasn't really affected in any way the claim of the Leader of the Official Opposition to the leader's allowance.

I don't see any reason why this issue comes up again and again with respect to the leader's allowance or the portion of the leader's allowance that is added to or is part of the New Democrat budget. I just want to say that this budget we're dealing with is for the year 2001 and beyond. The results of the next election will affect the caucuses' budgets with respect to the size of the caucuses. So I don't really see the point that Mr. Wickman is making here. Past the next election the shoe could be on the other foot.

In my view, I think the committee made absolutely the right decision in a multiparty system. I think democracy is well served if the Legislature gives due representation to the multiple voices that the electors of this province, through the democratic process, decide to bring into the Legislature. I think that's what guided, in my view, the decision of this committee three and a half years ago. That, I think, was a judgment which was sound and which received the support of all members of this committee. We should think and not just continue to return to this issue of why the New Democratic caucus has been given the funds so that it can represent not just the two constituencies that are represented through us but also the other Albertans who have voted for us over the years and during the last election.

I just want to say that the budget is appropriate, the decision of the committee was right, and let's look to the future and see what happens in the next election now. Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: My comment, Mr. Chairman – I'll read it for the third time. The point I'm making is that when we look specifically at the leader's office allowance in the New Democrat caucus, \$165,000 – I'm familiar with the history of that, and that's all fine. However, when we look at the Official Opposition, the leader's allowance is \$331,000, which is twice as much, yet at the present time there are seven and a half times as many members. So mathematically something there was wrong; something doesn't jibe. If the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona can rationalize the amount for the leader's office in his caucus, then possibly we should be reviewing the leader's allowance in the Official Opposition to bring it more in line with what the leader of the third party receives.

When I say seven and a half, I say seven and half at this time. When the formula was adopted prior to us losing, I believe, about three members or whatever, instead of seven and a half it was probably nine to one, yet the leader's allowance was only twice as much. So I'd just point out that there is something wrong there. If it's corrected after the next election when the new numbers come in, fine, but it should be recognized that there is great argument for the

Liberal opposition to receive more caucus funding.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Or less.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, please. Let's just remember that the way the decision was made is what the original allocation for the Leader of the Official Opposition was. We agreed at the time to do an averaging of ministerial office budgets and said that the Leader of the Official Opposition would get the average ministerial office budget. That's how that base was set. Then after that and beyond that, this committee decided that it wanted to give the leader of the third party a budget allocation equal to half of the Leader of the Official Opposition. That's just the historical correctness of it all.

Additional comments? Mr. Herard.

MR. HERARD: Yeah. I don't know that it should be looked at strictly in the sense of members because there is a threshold from which you have to have a minimum number of people. You can't, you know, have a third of a researcher, a third of a secretary, and so on. So I think it stands to reason that a smaller caucus will have a higher cost per member to operate, because you have to break that initial threshold of the number of people that it takes to provide good support for the democratic process. You know, I look at it and say that I don't think I want to make any changes either to the New Democratic caucus figures or to the Liberals'. I think that they're probably working just fine, thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Additional comments or questions?

Then, hon. members, if there are no further questions with respect to the budget, can I take you back to page 1 under the section that says estimate summary. Then it's a decision as per the suggestion of Mr. Wickman, and I heard Mr. Woloshyn deal with that again. On page 1 of 1 of the estimate summary, you see the profile and you see the grand total at the bottom, which is \$29,671,000. I'll request, then, a motion to approve the profile, with the grand total of \$29,671,000.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I so move.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Woloshyn. Seconded by Mr. Coutts. Additional comments? All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Thank you very much.

On our remaining agenda we'll go back to this. We'll come out of the budget one.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Could you just say that it's carried?

THE CHAIRMAN: It's carried.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Under New Business, Constituency Office E-mail and Internet Service. That was Ms Haley. I believe we've dealt with that. Is that correct?

MS HALEY: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. Wickman, extended benefits for constituency office and Legislative Assembly staff. Please proceed.

12:10

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, the seminar that was conducted,

I believe by members' services, talked in terms of events that occur during dissolution of this particular session when the election is called and the aftermath. In the aftermath, of course, MLAs are in a rather favourable position in terms of a decent severance package – let's put it that way – and the opportunity to extend benefits, health care benefits and such, for a period of time. A comment was made by a number of constituency staff, including from rural Alberta, and I was asked to bring the matter forward.

Staff of constituency offices in particular and the same is true of caucus staff – I would hope the member of the third party would agree with me – and to some degree, but they weren't represented at that particular meeting, Members of the Legislative Assembly, who are not covered by a collective agreement, who do not have a bargaining agent . . . . Anyhow, the bottom line is that consideration be given that those staff members, particularly from constituency and caucus offices, that will be leaving after the election because of the outcome of the election would like the opportunity to carry on for a period of time, say five years, the benefits they enjoy now at no cost to the government other than administrative costs. They would pick up the cost of the premium, but then they would benefit from the group premium rather than buying these benefits individually. Particularly when you look at things like dental care, accessing that as an individual family is very costly, but under a group plan it's considerably less.

I would hope we could give this serious consideration and actually have something in place prior to the end of this particular session. I don't know if that's ever been considered in the past. I don't know if any of the bargaining units for the normal provincial employees have ever attempted to negotiate that type of package. I'm not aware if management in some particular cases, for example, automatically get that because of their position; let's say deputy ministers and such. I'm not really sure. I'm not sure that there's been any research ever done on this in the past. I would have hoped somebody would have raised it some time prior, but they never had the opportunity because the former Speaker didn't host those types of activities that brought people together, and Members' Services I don't believe has done it to the same degree in the past.

THE CHAIRMAN: To my knowledge this matter has never been raised or reviewed before.

MR. WICKMAN: I would like to see it reviewed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Pannu, did you want to say something?

DR. PANNU: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I think Mr. Wickman's proposal is appropriate. Certainly I want to support it, and I think he has made it very clear that if we were to make a decision to extend this benefit, the extended benefits for constituency office and caucus staff, the only cost to the public treasury or to the LAO would be the administrative cost, that there would be no additional dollars required to respond to this decision if we were to make this decision. I certainly strongly support the suggestion and think it requires a study. It requires us to go back and request your office to make a study and then come back to us with their decision. I would very much like to support this.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any additional comments? Do I take it then, Dr. Pannu, you are moving a motion that we should undertake a review of this or a study of this?

DR. PANNU: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman, would you second that?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, I will.

THE CHAIRMAN: And committee members, are you in favour?

AN HON. MEMBER: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? I heard one voice agree, so carried.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

You know, hon. members, the next item is the date of the next meeting, and depending on the circumstances of the event, of what happens in the future, I think about the best I can say at the moment is that it's at the call of the chair or the request of the members.

There are four members on this Members' Services Committee that if we were not to have another Members' Services Committee, this will be their last meeting: Mr. Wickman, who I believe has probably spent now – what? – a dozen-plus years on the Members' Services Committee . . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Not plus.

THE CHAIRMAN: . . . Mrs. Sloan, who has spent three-plus years on this committee; Mr. Clegg, who I think has probably spent – what? – seven or eight years on this committee . . . .

MR. CLEGG: I guess. That's off and on.

THE CHAIRMAN: . . . and Mr. Jacques, the same amount of time. For these four individuals, if this is the last meeting, this would be the last opportunity we'll have them in this particular environment. I personally want to thank all four of them very much for their dedicated professional approach and their determination and their enthusiasm on behalf of the members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. I want to wish them all the very, very best into the future, as I would want to wish all the other members of the committee and thank them very much. And to all of you thank you so much and have a wonderful, wonderful, and peaceful season of goodwill and fine memories.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I just want to say, you know, that I tremendously enjoyed the experience of being part of this committee, and I've always tried to look at it from the point of view that we're a committee. Sometimes politics enters the picture, but by and large we recognize that what this committee does is for the benefit of all the Members of the Legislative Assembly, whether they be from government, Official Opposition, third party, whatever. In fact, I've enjoyed being part of this committee so much that I'd like to attend one more meeting in the early part of February so we can wrap up any detail that has to be wrapped up, such as the acceptance of the motion from Raj Pannu to review the health care benefits. Otherwise, I won't be around to further the arguments.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, as someone who has been on this committee only for a year or so and as someone who is going through his first term as an MLA and now as leader of the Alberta New Democrats I also want to express appreciation to the retiring members of this committee, particularly the four who won't be back in the Legislature. I have enjoyed being a colleague of theirs. They've been honourable in their conduct of business around this table and in the House, and I wish them the very best in their future pursuits.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, to all of you, then, thank you very much and the very, very best of the season. Boy, if I had known this would happen this way, I'd have arranged to buy you lunch.

Do we have a motion to adjourn?

MR. JACQUES: So moved.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 12:17 p.m.]