

Title: Tuesday, January 28, 2003 Members' Services Committee

Date: 03/01/28

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

THE CHAIR: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I do believe it's 9:30. Certainly it is Tuesday, certainly it is January 28, and the year is 2003. So welcome to this meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. This is committee room A. You'll note and recall from discussions over the last several years that we said that overall within the Legislative Assembly precincts the requirements oftentimes came for additional meeting rooms. With a large number of members located in this building and the opportunity to have some space in this building, we worked on this project and last year were able to see the opening of these two committee rooms. It may very well be that a number of members are meeting in one of these rooms for the first time. Technologically we're really up to date, ergonomically we're very up to date, and spatially we've got ample opportunity. This sort of reminds me of a classroom. Those of you who have had former experience in the classroom always know that nobody wants to sit near the front, that everybody wants to move to the back, so I appreciate my colleagues accepting an invitation to be at the forefront this morning. This allows the chairman to keep good access in a harmonious way of bonding.

Dr. McNeil, we've got some technological advances with this room. Why don't you just give us a very, very brief overview on what some of these items are?

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, I think the first thing you'll note is the sound system. During a meeting when *Hansard* is covering it, they'll turn your mikes on and off, but if you want to hold a meeting in here privately, then you can operate the mikes yourselves by pushing the button on and off. We also have capability for audiovisual presentation, so there's a screen that comes down here and a projector here. There is ability to access the Internet, so if you want to project the Internet from your computer screen onto the screen here, it has that capability. There are outlets at the side there where the press can plug in their tape recorders and so on. We can also do teleconferencing from here. We do have the equipment that if you want to do a teleconference with some other teleconference facility, it can be set up to do that. Any arrangements for that can be done through the committees branch of the Legislative Assembly, through the Clerk's office.

THE CHAIR: Okay. A neat gizmo. We have access here for the purveyors to the public, protectors of the public, the media, to actually use tape recorders. I was in Queen's Park in Toronto over the weekend for a presiding officers conference. Do you know that nobody can use tape recorders in Queen's Park, including the press? That really makes it kind of an interesting little scenario. I think that same rule applies to the Canadian House of Commons. I don't know if it would have an impact in Alberta if anybody were so brash as to suggest that, but no one is.

Can we have, then, an approval of the agenda? It was circulated quite a long time ago. I had an opportunity to meet with most members in December, worked on the agenda with you, and I think we posted it in the first few days of January of 2003. It was posted in the normal way, and if hon. members want to add something, now is the time. If not, I look forward to a motion to basically ask for the approval of the agenda.

MR. BRODA: So moved.

MR. MASON: Just a question.

THE CHAIR: Yes, sir, Mr. Mason.

MR. MASON: Mr. Chairman, at the last meeting a motion which I made relating to benefits for staff was tabled to this meeting, and I'm assuming it will come up under Old Business. Will that be automatic?

THE CHAIR: Either Old Business or under 6(d).

MR. MASON: Okay. It's not quite the same thing as the act, although it's the same question.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate that.

MR. MASON: But I'll take your direction on that.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Perhaps the best time would be under 6(d).

So there was a motion by Mr. Broda to move acceptance of the agenda. Seconded by Mr. Bonner. All okay? Thank you very much.

So, then, Approval of Minutes of December 11, 2001 Committee Meeting. They are in your book. I know that you've all had a pretty good opportunity to look at these minutes. There are just two things arising out of these minutes to draw your attention to. One is point 5, under Old Business, the long-term disability pension plan review. There was a report there by the chairman advising that "the issue was being investigated and that he would provide a report, including comparisons with other jurisdictions, at a future meeting." I continue to work on that, and I am sorry that I don't have anything more definitive to offer today but to bring you up to date with respect to that.

The other item is the one that Mr. Mason just raised, and that would be item 8(b). Mr. Mason at that time agreed to table his motion to the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and he's raised it in the last couple of minutes. My suggestion would be that we deal with it under 6(d), if that would be fine. Thank you very much.

Those are the two updates I had. If hon. members have a comment to make with respect to the minutes, I'm happy to hear them now.

MR. DUCHARME: I move approval of the minutes.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Ducharme has a motion. Mr. McFarland seconds. Any discussion, comments? Agreed? Okay. Thank you very much.

So basically we dealt with the two items under Old Business, and under New Business we have, first of all, the estimates for 2003-2004 of the Legislative Assembly budget. You have under separate copy a copy of the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2003-2004, and if you'd permit me to spend a few minutes with you, I'll give you an overview of it and then open it up.

What you have under the first section in the overview are the parameters that are included in this budget for 2003-2004. Please bear with me as I go through the parameters to bring you up to date as to exactly how this budget was prepared. It would probably answer a fair number of the questions.

First of all, in December of 2000 the committee agreed that the estimates should be rounded to the nearest thousand, so if you see an item in here and you take out your calculator and you say, "Well, it's \$17,243," essentially the number shown is probably \$17,000 by the rounding-off provision.

Secondly, all operational budgets—and as we go through each one of these sectional budgets, there are two components to it. One is the operational side, and the other one is the manpower side. The operational cost estimates were increased 2 percent as a result of the inflationary mechanism that we were able to ascertain. So if it deals with, again, operational matters, the number used was 2 percent.

In terms of the third item, member remuneration adjustments, Members of the Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta are bound by a formula called the average weekly earnings index for Alberta, based on the earnings index of the previous calendar year. So what we do is look at this index, which is published monthly by Statistics Canada and is accessible by anyone in the country of Canada. Basically they print an index number for each of the 12 months of the previous calendar year. However, when we meet in January or December, we don't know what that final number is going to be. We never get that final number till approximately April 1 of the following year. So this year is going to be no different than previous years. We'll know approximately April 1, 2003, what the final number for the average weekly earnings index of the previous calendar year has been. But in the sheet that you have attached behind the parameter sheet, you'll note that basically it appears that to the end of October that number shows a figure of 2.08 percent. If you looked at January, it was 2.92, February was 2.65, and then in August it was 1.52. By taking these numbers to that point in time, averaging it out, in the one column the change over the previous year is 2.08, and we have another figure in there of 2.11 to the end of October. So we're doing a little bit of guessing.

In terms, then, of building a budget and presenting a budget to you, the number that I have put in this budget is 2.25 percent. So there's a bit of guessing going on in here.

9:40

When we get the numbers for November, we get the numbers for December, then they're rounded off and adjusted and adjudicated by whatever the statisticians do. We will get a number on April 1 that probably will be less than 2.25 percent. So for budgeting purposes I put the number in of 2.25 percent. Whatever that number is that will come out on April 1, which will be the final number, it will be the number that then will be applied. If it's 2.1 percent, then that difference between 2.25 percent and 2.1 percent simply will be lapsed and returned to the general revenue fund of the province of Alberta at the conclusion of the fiscal year. It'll never be accessed; it'll never be utilized. That has been the policy that we've followed in previous years in terms of administration, and so that's the number that you've got for member remuneration adjustments. That number was used essentially for the manpower caucus budget adjustments, all of it, so the caucus budget adjustments are based on that same number of 2.25 percent.

The constituency services element – that is, the number for the constituency offices for the 83 members in the province of Alberta – is adjusted, again, by 2.25 percent. That's a consistent number. The communication element, which is one small component of the constituency office adjustments, is the component used to reflect the increase in postal rates and the number of electors as per the Chief Electoral Officer. The latest numbers given to us by the Chief Electoral Officer indicate that the number of electors in the province of Alberta is 1,903,291. That's the number we used to determine that small component, so those reflections are in there.

Under the next item, the promotional element, we're governed by the motion which says that this reflects the number of constituents in the province of Alberta as opposed to the number of electors in the province of Alberta. The most recent numbers given to us by the statistics branch of Alberta Finance indicate that the number of

constituents in Alberta is 3,114,000. So there were very, very minor adjustments in terms of what all that did.

In terms of dealing with the fiscal pressure for the manpower component of the Legislative Assembly Office – that is, the men and women who work in the Legislative Assembly – our policy is that they would follow the decisions and the provisions of the province of Alberta in negotiations with the public service sector in the province of Alberta. The public service sector and the government are currently in negotiation. There is no way of knowing what the conclusion to that negotiation will be and what the concluding numbers will be for April 1, 2003, so it's a pure guess from where I sit at the moment in terms of allocating dollars for the preparation of a budget of the Legislative Assembly branch. So what I've done is basically put the number in for April 1, 2003, to be the equal number that's in for April 1, 2002. I put it into a component in the budget called a financial contingency fund. It could just be called a contingency fund.

So in this current year the men and women of the Alberta public service received a salary adjustment of 4 percent and were eligible to have a merit adjustment of 4 percent. Our policy is that the men and women in the LAO would follow the government policy. So what we have in here is that same number for April 1, 2003, and it's focused in the contingency allocation. I have no way of knowing what's going to happen. Neither, I believe, do any of you have any way of knowing what the final negotiation is going to result in. If the final negotiation is less than what we have in the budget, we will apply the number that's in the final negotiation and lapse the difference in the budget, and it'll be returned to the general revenue fund, but for budgeting purposes, those are the dollars that have been put in here.

In addition to that, we are currently carrying 2.25 percent in the manpower component in the constituency offices and the caucus offices. I've added another 1.75 percent for these men and women, not for us. Those are the employees, and that 1.75 percent was added as well to that number in the contingency fund. So if, as an example, the conclusion and the negotiation between the government of Alberta and the public service of Alberta is 4 percent April 1, 2003, then the dollars would be applied. If it's less than 4 percent then they would have the difference, and we would have the protection up to 4 percent in the budget. Again, if it's less than what we carry in the budget, we do not allocate it. We lapse it. We apply exact numbers that are provided by the province of Alberta to its employees as a result of the negotiation. That's the parameter with respect to that.

This committee indicated that it wanted the transitional allowance to have no liability attached to it after a certain period of years, that it would actually be self-funding. So we're carrying the same number of dollars in the 2003-2004 budget as we've had in the previous years, and this will be completely self-supportable in two fiscal years from now as a result of the policy with respect to this.

For budgeting purposes 85 sessional days were used, and that's pretty consistent. Our definition of a sessional day is different than virtually every other jurisdiction in Canada. We sit in the evenings. Most parliaments in Canada do not sit in the evenings. When they do sit in the evening, they call that a second sessional day, but our definition of one sessional day is both an afternoon sitting, 1:30 to 5:30, and the evening sitting, beginning at 8 o'clock. So that's how we define it.

A lot of members basically say: well, we should define it. It wouldn't make any difference in terms of a budgeting process if we defined an evening session as a second session and the afternoon session as a first session, but at the end of the year it would simply say that we would have 170 sessional days instead of 85 sessional

days, and we'd be consistent with all other parliaments in Canada. The dollars are covered for the number of hours that it would be. By the way, we continue to set almost what seems to be new records of length as each year goes by in terms of the number of minutes that we sit in the House.

The next parameter, August 7, 2001, again just reflects the annual population estimates that I talked about a little earlier. The other one is the RRSP allowance allocation just carried again and exactly the same number as in the past. Of course, that Fort McMurray allowance is a result of, again, the government negotiation with the public sector with respect to that particular peculiarity in the Fort McMurray area. That's being carried again. That's \$400 a month.

We're continuing to budget to equip constituency offices with furniture/equipment upgrades over the three-year program that we had, and we are carrying 30 offices at \$12,000, for a maximum of \$360,000. That's consistent with what we had and continues in the policy that we have. Photocopier equipment is just a continuation of the policy that we created some time ago and exactly the same amount that we had in the previous year.

There's been one change within the administration of the various departments, agencies, and branches of the government of Alberta. In the last fiscal year the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta assumed responsibility for all telecommunication services from Alberta Infrastructure for private government members, Official Opposition, third party opposition, and the LAO branches. In this fiscal year \$77,000 was transferred from the MLA administration budget to the LAO branch budgets, as they become responsible for their branch's telecommunications charges. The net effect is zero dollars. It's just a matter of taking it out of one, putting it in another, and it's the same amount of money. There's no increase. It's just an administrative difference.

We've been advised as well that risk management and insurance have sent us an estimate for the upcoming year of 10 percent over the charge of 2002-2003. In the current fiscal year we're paying \$113,359 for this insurance premium. That will go up to \$124,695 as of April 1, 2003.

We have included funding for the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Ombudsman Search Committee, not a large amount of money for the time frame after April 1, 2003, because much of that work will be concluded before March 31, 2003.

9:50

In a nutshell, ladies and gentlemen, those are the parameters. You also have a sheet attached in the next section – and then I'm going to stop and open it up to questions before I go further – which is the overall budget for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the estimate comparison by various codes for the fiscal year 2003-2004, showing you a net expenditure item of \$35,847,000.

I will give you more information as we go through this, but just to give you one scenario which basically pops up here: if you were to take a look, the upcoming fiscal year of 2003-2004 shows a revenue figure of \$449,000. The Legislative Assembly Offices of Alberta will take in a revenue of \$449,000 as compared to the current year's revenue estimate of \$170,000. That shows that we must be selling something for a \$270,000 increase. Well, what's happened is that the Auditor General in one of his reports indicated that we have to clearly show what the revenue stream is. In the past we've had those dollars – Clerk, in House services?

DR. McNEIL: In the public information branch and subsequently in visitor services and House services.

THE CHAIR: In the past we've shown just the bottom-line

difference, so there's an adjustment downwards in one of those codes up above at the top in terms of the various branches to show the inventory costs and then to be matched by the dollar figure of the revenue of \$449,000. It's just, in the eyes of the Auditor General, a little more transparent with respect to it. It doesn't really affect the budget dramatically. It just shows that we have this revenue stream of \$449,000 with respect to it.

All the other numbers basically follow the parameters. You can see the contingency fund, which is aligned by itself in 2003-2004. That's for staff increases as a result of negotiations and the figure of \$607,000 to cover all of the staff except Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Following that sheet, again, you can see the three-year projected budget estimate. It shows that in 2005-2006 there'll be a reduction in the call for transitional allowance because of the buildup in that particular fund. The following sheet after that just gives you a little more detail, showing you where the variances are in each of these segments. Then there's the human resource component, the operational component, the revenue streams for 2003-2004, and the potential fiscal pressure contingency as well.

Now, I will stop if there are questions that the hon. members have before going into each and every one of these with more specifics. If you have some questions with respect to these parameters or explanations required, I'd be happy to try and provide.

Mr. Mason.

MR. MASON: Thanks. Just a few questions for clarification, Mr. Chairman. The members' services allowance increase of 1.75 percent and the caucus increase of 1.75 percent are to round up the increase of 2.25 percent so that it's equivalent to or would allow the caucuses to give staff increases equivalent to those received by the LAO. Is that correct?

THE CHAIR: That's correct. The LAO would also participate, though, for a possibility of an additional 4 percent as a result of merit adjustments that would not be provided for under the caucus or the constituency office funds at this time.

MR. MASON: Okay, but that's not a generalized increase for the LAO staff.

THE CHAIR: The 4 percent and the 4 percent are. It follows consistently with the public service.

MR. MASON: But the merit is not.

THE CHAIR: The merit is for the LAO staff but not the other staff.

MR. MASON: It's not automatic, though.

THE CHAIR: No, it's not automatic. It's adjudicated on performance.

MR. MASON: I wanted to ask about the transitional allowance contribution. This is one-third of the total fully funded allowance, this \$4.2 million in the budget that we've made the two previous years. Is that correct?

THE CHAIR: This will be the third year, yes.

MR. MASON: This is the third year. So the total amount in that fund would be, then, \$12.6 million, and that is the amount if every member cashed out in the next election.

THE CHAIR: No. Well, if the election were to be held today.

MR. MASON: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But this is being projected for two years. So no. If all members were to go at one time, all 83 at one time – Dr. McNeil, do you have that number? – it would be higher than that. We're not fully funded yet. We will be, though, when we arrive at the plan that we have.

MR. MASON: Okay. So is there money to be added in this budget in subsequent years?

THE CHAIR: Yes. It's pointed out in the profile on the three-year projections. It goes that, basically, in 2004-2005 it will be the same draw as this year, and then in 2005-2006 it starts to go down. The number reduces itself from \$4.2 million to \$2.3 million.

MR. MASON: Okay. When the fund covers the entire liability, what will the fund be at?

THE CHAIR: Approximately – what do you have for that number? – debt and liability, March 2005, \$16.6 million.

MR. MASON: Okay. Thanks very much.

THE CHAIR: This is good. This is very, very positive, to have that fully funded in there. Those dollars are protected, and those dollars are being administered.

MR. MASON: That fund will earn interest; will it?

THE CHAIR: Well, under the rules it doesn't.
Explain, Dr. McNeil.

DR. McNEIL: The fund will earn interest, but the interest is not allocated to the fund directly. It goes into general revenue.

MR. MASON: It goes back to general revenue.

DR. McNEIL: So the money is earning interest. It's just that the fund itself doesn't accrue that interest.

THE CHAIR: Additional questions on the parameters? Okay.

Then your wish is that we go through each one of these various segments. Then would you like questions and answers as we go through each one or that we go to the end and then have questions and answers? Go to the end? Then I will just probably be governed by my accelerated approach and just see how long it will take.

Okay. The first one, the financial management and administrative services branch. A small branch; it has eight employees in it. Oh, by the way, same manpower. There are no adjustments in manpower. Same manpower in 2003-2004 as currently, in this fiscal year. No adjustments there. No additions to overall staff. Same number. So they are basically looking at their budget of \$542,000. Forty thousand of the \$55,000 increase covers existing salary levels and employee benefits. I might add that the employee benefits side has become a real driver if we have a manpower budget, and you can see the breakdowns there: \$5,000, again, that telecommunications transfer which was taken away from the one central core, applied to each one, and labour services allocated at \$10,000 per annum for support services for the Legislature Annex committee rooms. It is very, very straightforward. You can see the numbers. They've been there and just reflect, really, basically the premium costs associated

with employees and the like. You'll find this consistent through all of these various branches.

10:00

The next one, the human resources branch. Again, a small branch, of seven people. There was a reclassification of one position to management. There was equity adjustment of a management position. There was reclassification of an existing position. Then the employees' contributions. Again, those adjustments, whatever they are, from health care to CPP to what have you. There is an increase there of \$16,000 into it. You've got the telecommunications adjustment of \$7,000 and, again, the same number of manpower, seven. Very straightforward.

The one you're all waiting to see, of course, is the Speaker's office, and I know how meticulous you're going to be about this. It's three manpower in the Speaker's office. The draw for the Speaker's office for 2003-2004 is \$361,000, as compared to the current fiscal year number of \$354,000, an adjustment there of \$7,000. Again, it's a combination of the employer contributions, the \$2,000 for the reallocation of telephone line charges. Essentially, that's it.

The next one. The public information branch has 13 employees. Once again, the employer contributions. Oh, we've got \$4,000 set aside for replacement of headphones for use with *Hansard* transcription equipment, and again the \$6,000 telecommunications adjustment. Very straightforward. That budget moves from \$1,052,000 to \$1,077,000, an increase of \$25,000.

Legislature Library. We have 16.3 employees involved in the Legislature Library. Again, you're looking at the human resource side. There's \$39,000 in the human resource side, and the operational side is also \$39,000, including that we're going to send one of the librarians to an international library conference. It's going to be held in Canada, the first time in 20 years. A few dollars set aside for her to attend, I think, professional development. That side is very, very important. There's tremendous inflation in this area in terms of buying periodicals, magazines, whatever gizmo there is and whatever new kind of product that's available. The inflation rate and the adjustment rate are usually double-digit, but they're managing with the budget allocations that we're providing them with.

House services has 30.6 employees. This basically is the service for the running of the Legislative Assembly, one aspect of it. With respect to that, \$2.954 million. The human resources side is \$98,000. Again, it's based on the budgeting for the sessional days for security, page staff, other people associated with it, and the operational side adjusted modestly. Our telecommunications increase in that one is \$25,000. The other segment is that I basically indicated that the gift shop inventory had to be allocated, where the Auditor General had said: you have to make an adjustment with respect to this to show it coming out on a line by itself. You can see our revenue from operations included in there of \$280,000. This is a busy little area.

The next one is information systems services. This is the technology side of it. Ten years ago, I guess, when the Members' Services Committee met, it was basically dealing with typewriters and some photocopier machines. Well, since then we have adopted all the policies that we have in terms of the electronic equipment we have, in terms of what is available in all the offices, what is available in the Legislative Assembly. This continues to be a great driver of things. Our policy, basically, is replacement on a two-year rotational basis, but in the last year there had been a whole bunch of people coming to me all of a sudden, saying: there's a new kind of monitor out there on the market that everybody's just got to have. We haven't budgeted for any of that. These bigger, larger monitors are

– sorry; I've got a problem trying to remember my cell phone number. I don't mean that I'm not interested; it's just that we haven't become too inventive and adventuresome in the budget for April 1, 2003. It seems that our 83 members and all the caucus staff and all the constituency staff – I don't think I'm too far out in saying this. In terms of MLAs and how attuned they are, probably about one-third are really wired into technology, maybe one-third are part-time technology users, and probably one-third are basically saying, "Ho hum," but we're driven by the one-third that are wired. That's good, but it is a big area. Look at the budget for data processing equipment: \$726,000.

Legislative committees. This budget shows a modest reduction in terms of legislative committee work, going down from \$259,000 to \$235,000. Needless to say, some of the big reviews were done in the current fiscal year, and you can see the parameter breakdown again. Telecommunications in that area showed an adjustment of \$9,000.

The next one, MLA administration. This is the budget that includes expense categories for pay and benefits for the Members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly, constituency office related expenditures, as well as operational expenses like travel, office equipment, and telecommunications. We built into this one the 2.25 percent for members. Then you can see all the other charges. So that overall one would move from \$11,894,000 to \$12,124,000: about \$230,000 on \$12 million. It's based on the formulas that I talked about before, the 2.25 percent max and the 2 percent operational side.

The next one, then, is caucus allocations. The first one is the government members, 49 government members. This is where the rounding does show some adjustments downward rather than upward. In the current fiscal year the budget is based on \$53,000 for each of 49 members of the government caucus. In the upcoming one it goes to \$54,000. The rounding off goes down rather than up on the thousand dollar thing. So that shows, basically – there are 49 members – an increase of \$1,000 per member for the government caucus. That's \$49,000.

For the Official Opposition: seven members, an increase of \$1,000 per member. So that's an increase of \$7,000. Then the Leader of the Official Opposition's office gets an allowance of \$370,000 plus \$59,000 for the Calgary caucus office.

So there you've got the government budget, \$2.646 million; the Official Opposition budget, \$807,000; and the third party, again, based on two members, including their private members' allowance and their leader's office allowance of \$185,000, which is half of the number allocated to the Leader of the Official Opposition, for a number for the third party office of \$293,000.

We have no private members, but we carry a line with no budget allocation in it. We have no vacancies, but we carry a line with nothing in it.

For the Electoral Boundaries Commission we carry a number of \$19,000. The Electoral Boundaries Commission for all intents and purposes should have its work finished. In the report that it published in September, it indicated that it would have its report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by March 25, 2003. However, it's rather interesting. Senior Parliamentary Counsel, you just correct me if my dates are wrong. I was originally advised that the Chief Electoral Officer's interim report would come out on September 9. There was a glitch in printing, so we received it on September 17, I believe, and released it immediately on September 17. I'm waiting to see when this report will come, because the act basically says that the final report has to be provided five months after the interim report. The document the chairman of the electoral commission put out basically said that the report had to be provided to the Speaker by March 25. So sometime between next week and

March 25 the report will be presented. I'll get the report. I make it public automatically as soon as I get it. So that's the best I can advise you at the moment.

There's the overview, hon. members. I'd be happy to try and answer any and all questions.

10:10

MS HALEY: Just some clarification on what you just said. Five months after the date it was first released, September 17 plus five months. Is that what you're saying?

THE CHAIR: Well, one might argue even September 9. But I'm going to be meeting with Mr. Clark tomorrow to try and ascertain this, because my understanding is that the statute said five months after the interim report. So if you project it, it would either be . . .

MS HALEY: February.

THE CHAIR: Ninth or 17th.

MS HALEY: Right. Okay. I just wanted clarification.

THE CHAIR: Unless there's another printing glitch.

MS HALEY: I'm confident it can't happen twice; okay?

THE CHAIR: That's right; unless there's another printing glitch. I don't know. We're not privy to any of that.

MR. HORNER: Just a couple of clarification questions that are probably very minor. Under the House services budget we're showing a revenue of \$280,000 on the one sheet, but on the estimates it's showing the \$420,000. Is the \$280,000 what the adjustment was over and above what we would normally have?

THE CHAIR: That's my understanding, but, Dr. McNeil, do you want to just add something?

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. HORNER: Okay, just for clarification.

The other one. You mentioned, Mr. Chairman, about the new monitors, and I wasn't clear. Are we buying the new monitors or not buying the new monitors? My view would be: don't buy the new monitors.

AN HON. MEMBER: You can't have one, Doug.

MR. HORNER: No, I don't want one. It's too much money for what you get.

THE CHAIR: Well, we have a policy of a two-year changeover in equipment. So whatever the date is on the equipment that you have in whatever office it is you have, two years later Mr. Gano or one of his people will arrive and say: well, the policy says that you can replace this. So the question first is: do you want to replace it? Do you need to replace it? If the answer to the first two questions is, "No, no," then he goes away and he's quite happy. If, on the other hand, you say, "Yes, yes," then you or somebody associated with you will probably say, "Well, can we not have this regular screen now but can we have this new monitor?" at which point in time the difference is probably a thousand bucks or something. Our thought will be that we should wait till they go down.

MR. HORNER: Yes, please.

THE CHAIR: But don't micromanage; okay? We may find a real good deal someplace.

MR. HORNER: Thank you.

MS HALEY: I'm sorry, but as one of those people that are wired into the Internet and various other places, first off, I'd like to point out that MLAs have access to a laptop, and it really doesn't matter what the monitor is like because it comes as a laptop. So, you know, just for clarification, Mr. Chairman.

The second point is that most of the monitors are now around \$500. So it's not an extra two or three thousand dollars or an extra thousand. Most of the monitors that you can get – a 15-inch flat screen – take up about a quarter of the space on your desk. As a staff person it can actually make a huge difference, and they're between five and seven hundred dollars. I just wanted you to know that.

THE CHAIR: That's very useful information because the most recent information I had on this was that it might be a thousand dollars. So it's already coming down in the last couple of weeks, which is good. Don't misunderstand me. We'll be very, very proactive. It's just that we're not going to go out and buy 83 new monitors tomorrow because there's a new one on the market. I appreciate that.

DR. MASSEY: Under House services, the revenue, it's the forecasted increase in activities for the School at the Legislature program. I'm not quite clear.

THE CHAIR: Go ahead, Dr. McNeil.

DR. McNEIL: I think the main revenue there is the gift shop sales, which were sort of netted out in the past, and now we're recognizing them in terms of the total sales in the gift shop.

DR. MASSEY: Is there any revenue from the School at the Legislature?

DR. McNEIL: I think that there's just a small amount, a thousand dollars or something like that.

THE CHAIR: Maybe the revenue is more than offset by the cost of the operation.

DR. McNEIL: Yes, it's offset by the cost of the operations.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Broda, then Mr. McFarland.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. I'm just going back to the monitor thing, if I can. You mentioned updating every two years. If you say, "I don't want to get updated this year," do you have to wait another two years? Do they leave you alone for two years, or do they come back to you next year?

THE CHAIR: No. If you cross the two-year threshold, and you say, "Well, I don't need it now, but maybe six months from now," we would try and accommodate you. Yes. We would not drop you off the list.

MR. BRODA: Sure. Okay.

THE CHAIR: Mr. McFarland, and then Mr. Mason.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the technology and the pricing of it, what sort of monitoring, so to speak, does the group have to watch what prices are actually doing? I know I'm not one of the wired people, but the PalmPilots that I was familiar with – and I got one – were over \$600, and within a year, maybe a little bit more, they were down to the high \$200 range for I think virtually the very same product. Would it be reasonable when you're coming up with provisions for equipment that if somebody wants to jump into it right away, knowing that the price is going to come down as technology comes in, they can do it but they pay the additional expense themselves?

THE CHAIR: Well, our policy prescribes what is available to current members. Palms are not. So if an hon. member wanted to purchase a PalmPilot, they would have one of three funding sources: their own pocket; they might be able to make an argument that it would come under the constituency allocation; or they might go and see their whip and try and get it paid for under the caucus allocation.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Chairman, I was just trying to point it out because of my limited knowledge of the electronic items and not wanting to speculate on the cost of computers and monitors and all that.

THE CHAIR: At the moment you're on your own, Mr. McFarland.

MR. McFARLAND: And the second comment, not a question, dealt with the constituency upgrades.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR. McFARLAND: It was just a compliment more than anything. I think a month and a half from now it'll be 11 years since I got elected. In all that time, we had surplus equipment from a Claresholm depot, I believe, and there was absolutely nothing wrong with it. It was something that you became accustomed to. I wanted to compliment the staff who allowed the constituency assistant to shop around locally and actually come up with substantial savings on the allocation. The flexibility was greatly appreciated, and the equipment and the surroundings for the staff are greatly appreciated, so hats off to your staff.

THE CHAIR: Well, hats off in this case to your constituency because that's what we encourage. Absolutely correct. We've got a policy about applying it, but if there's a central supplier of office equipment that's 500 miles away from where you live, well, then one has to build in the transportation costs and all the other costs. If you can buy it locally, buy it locally. Absolutely correct.

MR. McFARLAND: I believe we came up with something, quite an enormous saving compared to what it could have been. So thanks again.

THE CHAIR: We're doing quite well in that program. I've not had any complaints from any members. Those who did get it done were quite happy and satisfied. Not all members had it required because there were adjustments made in the last number of years.

In my case an example that was done in just the last couple of weeks, the first time in 20 years: I got a coffee pot, which is good. Mr. Mason, and then Mrs. Jablonski.

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Coffee is good.

I want to ask about the human resources expenses under information systems. There's an increase of \$75,000 to reclassify two positions to management. I'm just wondering what the positions are and if there are others that I may have missed.

THE CHAIR: Okay. The person in charge of the information services branch is Mr. Gano. Bill Gano's here. Bill, can you add some clarification to that?

MR. GANO: Yes. Over the past couple of years in information systems we have gone through a reorganization, and two positions were reclassified to management. We now have a manager of planning and development, which is Val Rutherford, and we have a manager of network and client support services, and that's Rafael Valencia. The number of positions did not change; however, those two positions were reclassified.

10:20

THE CHAIR: Brian, this is that area where in the last number of years we talked about always losing staff and rotating it because of the economic situation in the private market. Mr. Gano, has it settled down? Are we having better luck retaining people these days than we had before?

MR. GANO: Yes, most definitely. Our turnover rate has dropped quite dramatically, and we've had fairly stable staff for about two to three years now.

THE CHAIR: Brian.

MR. MASON: Thank you. I'm just wondering if there's policy around the moving of people, reclassifying people upward in the scale. Is there anything to ensure that it doesn't drive costs over the long run?

THE CHAIR: Well, the policy is this. First of all, the Clerk has to deal with me, and he has to convince me that these things are required and necessary. He would only arrive at my desk with such an argument, I guess, if he had done the due diligence with respect to his own staff. So we'll ask him to verify that this is okay.

DR. McNEIL: Yes, and we for the most part would follow the standard policy that applies in government with respect to reclassifications to management and so on, but also, you know, recognizing that, especially in the information systems area, it's a very competitive market. So we want to make sure that in making those adjustments we remain competitive within the public service so that we're not losing our staff to government departments or outside.

MR. MASON: Do you keep track of the proportion of management to nonmanagement people in the operation?

DR. McNEIL: Yes. I would say that that's a normal aspect of managing an organization.

MR. MASON: Through you, Mr. Chairman, has that ratio changed substantially over the last 10 years or so?

DR. McNEIL: No.

MR. MASON: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: This is an area that we have to pay special, careful attention to. If you go back the last number of years, three years, four years ago, we were having a devil of a problem. Either the economy was overly heated compared to what it is today, or we were so dramatically underpaying these people that nobody ever stayed. They came, they got an entry position, were gone in three months, and we had absolute – well, chaos is too strong a word. But we had a lot of frustration in the various caucuses in this area.

So then we created that technical committee with caucus representatives and went to work on it. It came down essentially to having the people that you required to do the service that you needed and making sure that they received the salary competitive with either the private sector or, in fact, the public sector in the province of Alberta so they simply didn't show up one day and three months later go across the street and work for somebody else. That has settled down. So we have that stability now, which is very important.

Mrs. Jablonski.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Besides the furniture in our constituency offices I think the most important asset that we have there is our assistants. I find that my assistant is a very hard-working person. We receive a lot of phone calls from people who are in need, and he does an excellent job of helping me out with the answers to the questions that we receive. I find that they work just as hard as our assistants in Edmonton, in the Legislature, and I'm just wondering why we classify them differently and they're not part of the increases that our LAO assistants receive.

THE CHAIR: Well, I think that's a very, very valid question, and I think that it's a subject matter that, in fact, this committee has to address itself to, and it's a subject matter that I want to address as we go through the remainder of the year.

On the agenda there's a section in there about the Chief Electoral Officer's report, and basically we'll come to it later in the day. I want to make this argument, because he has made this argument in his interim report, and that is that we have to have a review of the funding parameters that we have for our constituency offices. I'm very empathetic to what you're saying, and I buy into your argument completely. What we've got is a situation where we have a central core, and this is probably no different than it is with any other sector, private sector or public sector. Those at the core of the centre, basically, it's not that they ignore the people outside the centre; it's just that they don't have the same degree of empathy for them. In the case of the LAO that's not true because the LAO people here very much appreciate the work of the constituency offices. We've been driven by decisions that we've made in this committee in the past, and we have basically said that dollars will be allocated to each caucus, that the caucuses then will determine how they want to allocate those dollars. So, okay. Whoever goes in the three caucuses: you make those decisions. We're not involved in those decisions.

When it comes to the constituency offices, we've basically said that we will have a budgetary figure given to each MLA in the province of Alberta. The MLA can choose to either have a constituency office, have two constituency offices, or have no constituency office and use those funds for the legitimate opportunities there are. The MLA then determines who it is that he or she wants employed in his or her office. There's a tremendous variance of skills, and there's a tremendous variance in the pay allocations that members provide to these various constituency assistants. I agree with you completely that they are probably the most important people in the system because they are the frontline

people. They are the first people that get it. They're dealing with people every day in some part of Alberta with a myriad of problems, and they have no backup. They tend to work in a lonely situation by themselves, sometimes in a risky environment, and we have no standard approach in what we're doing.

What I would like to do sometime in the upcoming fiscal year is basically sit down and talk to all of you and then work with other members of the Assembly and say, "Well, how would we like to see this changed?" and basically work toward some of those changes in concert with some of the recommendations that have been made by Mr. Clark in his interim report and basically have such a proposal available for the Members' Services Committee to look at in the future. What we've got in here right now is a possibility of up to 2.25 percent and a possibility of up to an additional 1.75 percent for these people, but you are making the call. Each individual member will determine how they want to pay these people and what benefits they have for these people. Right now there is just a tremendous range. It's almost 83 different packages. But I certainly subscribe to the fact that they are vitally important people. Absolutely.

I don't know what other members have to say.

MR. MASON: Just on that point, Mr. Chairman. I apologize; I didn't realize when I raised the question that the adjustment didn't apply to the constituency people.

THE CHAIR: It does. The same thing as the caucuses.

MR. MASON: Oh, okay. Well, then, I really am confused.

THE CHAIR: I think that what Mrs. Jablonski is basically saying is that it's not enough. It's still not equitable to various people.

MR. MASON: Oh, I see. Okay.

THE CHAIR: See, I have no idea what you pay your staff in your caucus office. There are two members. You get \$108,000 plus \$185,000; \$293,000 is the ND budget. I don't know how you allocate that because we have never had that discussion, and the decision is that you decide what you're going to do on your own. But I do know what goes on in the constituency ones because they are direct employees of the LAO, which we're responsible for. Well, I'm not even going to make a comment because I have no idea what you pay and don't what to, by the way, unless you want me to.

MR. MASON: Yeah. I just wanted to be assured that the money is there so that the increase that is received by the LAO staff will also be available to us for our caucus staff and our constituency assistants.

THE CHAIR: And that's true.

MR. MASON: And that's correct.

THE CHAIR: Up to a maximum of 4 percent.

MR. MASON: Yes. Thank you.

MS HALEY: Just to clarify, Mr. Chairman. That's based on what the negotiations would end up being?

THE CHAIR: That's what I said: up to. Yeah.

MS HALEY: And to point out that this is, I think, the first time that

we've actually included it as a budget item for the constituency staff. It's never been this way before. Traditionally, in my time here constituency offices, as you pointed out, have been – it's all over the map. I mean, everybody pays a different rent. You know, you can pay hourly or you can pay monthly to your staff person there. Some of them work part-time; some of them are there beyond full-time. So there are vastly different circumstances. Our problem has been in not recognizing that. As costs have gone up in the province, we've not really dealt with this issue at the constituency level. So I'm really glad if we have an opportunity to review this, because I know that there are places where rent is extraordinarily high and it cuts out most of your constituency budget. In other places the rent is lower, but it's very difficult to hire anybody. So it's all over the map, and we really do need to address it, I think, in a more intelligent way than it has been.

10:30

THE CHAIR: What Ms Haley is saying is absolutely correct, because in that constituency office allocation you have all the components. You have the rent side, and I do know that there's a variance as much as threefold. From the minimum rent that one member would pay to the maximum rent another member would pay there's probably three times the difference. So if one were paying \$600 a month, probably the maximum is \$1,800, \$1,900, and some people pay utilities over and above that, depending on where you're located in the province of Alberta. So if you have the same constituency budget but your cost of operation is three times higher than another person, well, needless to say, you don't have that flexibility, then, in dealing with the manpower side of it. That's absolutely correct.

Mr. Broda.

MR. BRODA: Yes. I'd just like to echo the same sentiments. As Carol has said, our constituency office workers do work very hard and a lot of times are the first ones to get the call. I'm glad to hear that you've indicated that we should review that policy that we have.

I have some ideas. It's not the time to discuss it, but when we do have that discussion, I think we should be looking at it. I'm glad to hear that we're going to do that, because there are different skills out there in our constituencies, as you indicated. Some have good computer skills; some don't. Likewise, even in our Leg. Assembly our staff here have different skills as well.

That's the comment I wanted to make. Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Additional comments or questions?

There's one aspect for consideration because we are on constituency offices. I will divert just a bit. One of the responsibilities of the Sergeant-at-Arms is to visit all the constituency offices when he can. In addition to that, we bring in all the constituency office assistants and have an opportunity once or twice a year for them to either meet with us in Calgary or meet with us in Edmonton in a professional development day, and I think that's working out very, very well. I think they feel good about it. They feel a part of it. They're up to date.

One of the aspects, though, that we have to continue to work on – and this is where the Sergeant-at-Arms comes in – is basically the security side. Many of you here know how secure this place is: cards and everything else. But no constituency office has any – well, there are a couple. No constituency office is anywhere near that way. These people are there by themselves, and you have no idea what the individual circumstances are. So one of the responsibilities that the Sergeant-at-Arms has is to basically make himself available to any office assistant throughout the province and to basically talk about those subject matters and to deal with those subject matters. He

keeps me abreast of what's going on and up to date with respect to that. I think, for the most part, relatively relaxed, Mr. Sergeant-at-Arms, with that subject matter?

MR. HODGSON: Yes, sir.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MS HALEY: Mr. Chairman, I have an anecdote, if you don't mind.

THE CHAIR: An anecdote?

MS HALEY: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MS HALEY: I have an alarm system in my office because we had some problems a number of years ago, and it was time to have the alarm system updated because it was becoming defective. We thought it was turned off, and the guy was in to work on the alarm system. I just want you to know, Mr. Chairman, that the alarms actually work, because he was trying to connect different things up and all of a sudden the RCMP came bursting through the door yelling at my assistant: what the hell is going on in here? She was just totally freaked because she had no idea that the alarm had been reactivated. So I just want you to know that, yes, the RCMP do actually respond.

THE CHAIR: The experience I have in terms of surveying that indicates that there's a very quick response time if there's a police force in the area.

MS HALEY: Okay. Fair enough.

THE CHAIR: If there's no police force in the town that you've got your constituency office in, well, then there's a delay. Yeah. Absolutely correct.

MR. McFARLAND: I guess I still have the distinction, Mr. Chairman, of having the cheapest rental rate in the entire province.

THE CHAIR: Oh, well, aren't we fortunate now?

MR. McFARLAND: It would be interesting to see – and we are going to renegotiate – that it would probably be spun as rental rates go up 300 percent or something, but when you go from \$30 a month to a hundred . . .

MS HALEY: Oh, geez. I don't even want to talk to you, man.

MR. McFARLAND: I know nobody wants to talk to me, but it's the advantage of a small town. On the other hand, it's still a net sum difference of minus something with the office upgrade equipment when you look at the total number of dollars that we've spent, which gets me to the question on the constituency assistant. I don't mind and I support the comments that have been made about the pay levels, but I certainly wouldn't like to see us put ourselves in a position where we had no flexibility on hours, days of work if the constituency assistant has to attend a function because we're 300 miles away in one of the 25 towns that we serve. So although I do appreciate that it's nice to be able to pay on a scale equitable to somebody in Edmonton, I also want us to remember that we want to

have a little bit of flexibility for those people that are, you know, working on our behalf back home.

THE CHAIR: Additional comments from hon. members?

MR. MASON: On another item, Mr. Chairman. I've lost it now, but there was a reduction in a couple of the budgets that I saw for the cancellation of Mr. Speaker's model parliament, and I was curious about that, why that program was discontinued and whether there's an all-in number for its elimination, the savings.

THE CHAIR: Well, Mr. Speaker's parliament was done in concert with the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, and we created it several years ago. You can see a reduction there of \$5,000 because this youth model parliament program was discontinued.

Last year, in 2002, in the third year of the program, if you recall the environment, there was a situation that had developed with respect to education and the Alberta Teachers' Association. We had programmed Mr. Speaker's youth model parliament to go forward and had done all the advertising and had done all the preparation work. This is a very, very labour-intensive parliament, nearly three days of time. It involved half a dozen people in the LAO on almost a month of full-time work on their part. It involved the involvement of the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. A lot of their people did supervision of all these 83 young people. They were available to drive buses, and they were allocating \$25,000 a year to the program. As we got closer to the date of the program, all of a sudden we found that the 15 or so teachers that were really required to help us run the program found themselves unable to participate, shall I say.

MR. MASON: I understand the situation now.

THE CHAIR: That put a really negative onus on everything. So we decided that if we're going to do a program under the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, we should be able to do it without having to be dependent upon outside forces. So it was a very, very reluctant decision; it was a very difficult decision. We were not enthusiastic about canceling it, and neither was the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command enthusiastic about seeing it ended, but it was the decision that was required at the time, and it was done.

So there is no more Mr. Speaker's youth model parliament. From my perspective, I will not find myself dependent upon outside forces to deal with it. You'll see on the agenda today that there's a proposal for a new kind of alternative. It's called Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day, and we'll come to it later. With it came a reduction in terms of dollars. The Legion, again, were supporting us to the tune of \$25,000 a year, and they were very, very happy to do it. They were really thrilled with the whole thing and really looked forward to it. But, alas.

MR. MASON: That's unfortunate.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR. MASON: Mr. Chairman, the item that I have here is \$5,000 for hosting. Was that the total expenditure for the program?

THE CHAIR: No. The Legion put in \$25,000.

MR. MASON: Yeah, but from our side?

THE CHAIR: Yes. So we reduced it.

MR. MASON: Thank you.

10:40

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Chairman, I would like to comment on Mr. Mason's comment as well. You know, it might be one thing to say that it's unfortunate that it happened, and I understand your predicament where you relied on 15 professionals to help you run the program, but from a constituency perspective it didn't even get to that point. I find it totally unacceptable that perhaps the invitations that went out to the schools were never even distributed to the kids so that they had an opportunity to make their own decision as to whether they wanted to partake or not. Maybe it's not appropriate for me to make a political statement to that effect, but I really find it sad that a good service, that the Royal Canadian Legion did partake in for years, was suddenly put at risk and in jeopardy simply because somebody's political agenda prevented kids who may never have another opportunity to come up to the Legislative Assembly from doing so. That's what I found was pretty sad.

THE CHAIR: Mrs. Jablonski.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm concerned about security issues for MLAs. Being that we've had some increased incidents in the past where somebody loses it and we had an incident with our Justice department, I'm just wondering if there has been any consideration given to home security for MLAs, who are public figures and, therefore, can become public targets if anybody should be unhappy with some things. I just wondered if that has been discussed.

THE CHAIR: Well, Mrs. Jablonski, I'll make a comment with respect to my current position as Speaker of the Alberta Legislative Assembly but also one with perspective from the past when I was minister of Alberta public safety services and the conclusion I reached a long time ago that the best discussion on security was no discussion.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Additional questions?

MR. MASON: This is not specifically on the budget, but I'm looking at the library budget, and it occurs to me that this committee really has oversight of our library. Is that correct?

THE CHAIR: Oversight?

MR. MASON: Well, it's up to us what the library does and how it meets our needs.

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. In terms of the budget, yes.

MR. MASON: I really think it's such an important thing, yet I know very little about it and how it operates. I guess I'd like to suggest that we could maybe benefit by having a little bit of a presentation at one of our meetings or at a special meeting from the library and have some discussion about what it does and how it could serve the needs of the members and so on. I think I could stand some education on that subject.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Well, when you get the invitation from me to come to the Legislature Library Tea in the spring, you accept it this year. That's exactly what we've been doing every year in the spring: having an open house.

MR. MASON: Well, then, don't call it a tea.

THE CHAIR: Well, I'm sorry it's a macho kind of thing, but we do have a spring tea.

MR. MASON: Beer and nachos.

THE CHAIR: Well, I'll talk to the librarian about that.

Actually there are some very interesting projects. One of the things that happened last year in the library was a project with the Alberta Heritage Community Foundation, which is a very, very good organization. It has gone really high tech with information in terms of a whole series of new web sites, and one of the ones that was created last year had to do with the electoral history of the province of Alberta. They did this on their own. They came, visited in consort, and we co-operated and helped, didn't really put any money into the project. There is now currently a web site out there with the Canadian Heritage Foundation. It was unveiled and opened in the library, and some of you may have been there that day. They have potential in there of doing on-line interviews with members, a complete history of all the electoral divisions in the province of Alberta going back to 1905, all kinds of statistical data, and it's one of those reaching-out things. It was very, very positive.

Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you. I guess the only thing I wanted to clarify for Mary Anne's benefit is that if there are MLAs that have a problem with security, then we'd recommend strongly that they talk to our Sergeant-at-Arms on an individual basis. I didn't want to leave that sort of just out there.

THE CHAIR: No. Fair game. That's the process: come visit.

Well, hon. members, would you like to proceed, then, on the basis of each one of these items with a motion and approval? So, then, let's go to your estimates sheet. I guess it's page 1 of 1 in the first binder, estimates summary, and the first one that we'll look at will be the financial management and administrative services, a budgeted figure of \$542,000. Do you want one motion at the conclusion of all of this or one motion for each one of these lines? The manner in which we proceeded last year, as I recall, was one at the conclusion. That'll be fine?

So the first one, financial management and administrative services. Mr. Mason.

MR. MASON: If I can, Mr. Chairman. While I support the budget generally, I want to have an opportunity to vote against the transition allowance figure of \$4,200,000. So how could I do that?

THE CHAIR: You have to vote against the budget at the end if we follow the process of one vote.

MR. MASON: Could we have a separate vote on that?

THE CHAIR: The wish of the members.

MR. MASON: Well, then, I just want to indicate, Mr. Chairman, if we're going to have one vote, that the only reason I'm voting against the budget is that item. The rest of the budget looks in order to me.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So the financial management and administrative services call is for \$542,000; the human resource services call is for \$712,000; the Speaker's office call is for \$361,000; the public information branch, \$1,102,000; the Legislature Library, \$1,457,000; House services, \$3,374,000; information systems services, \$1,962,000; Legislature committees, \$236,000; for a subtotal under the codes for the Legislative Assembly of \$9,746,000.

Now, the next item has to do with the next code, which is MLA administration, \$17,978,000. Then government member services, \$2,646,000; Official Opposition services, \$807,000; New Democratic caucus services, \$293,000. So you get a subtotal for those last three of \$3,746,000 and to this point in time a total expenditure of \$31,470,000.

We have a revenue of \$449,000, so that becomes a net total of \$31,021,000.

Then we have budgeted a transition allowance, consistent with the past, of \$4.2 million, a potential fiscal pressure contingency of \$607,000, Electoral Boundaries Commission of \$19,000, for a net expenditure of \$35,847,000 and the staff years of 89.9.

Those are the parameters for the budget, with the bottom line of \$35,847,000 and 89.9 staff years. I would welcome a motion. Ms Haley has the motion. Mr. Horner seconds. Discussion? All in favour? Opposed? So all in favour and Mr. Mason opposed. Thank you very much.

Now, in addition, falling out of this, we need, then, a constituency services amendment order. It just basically says that we're moving the allocation for constituency services. The base constituency services goes to \$51,809. In the current fiscal year the base for the constituency office shows \$50,669. As a result of that adjustment we agreed to, that will go to \$51,809. Then the allocation based on, I guess, electors – it's based on currently 94 cents, and that will be increased to 96 cents. A mover? Mr. McFarland. A seconder? Mrs. Jablonski. All in favour? Agreed unanimously. Okay. Done. So that covers the administrative side of that.

10:50

All right. So then on the agenda, under Other Business there is an item there called Commercial Advertisements Involving Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The only reason I put it on the agenda is that the conflicts of interest and Ethics Commissioner sent a note to all Members of the Legislative Assembly dated November 27, 2002. All caucuses and their representatives were involved in the drafting of this general advice. The only reason that I have it on the agenda is that I wanted to make sure that all members, number one, were aware that it had come, that it came as a result of the consultation.

I was involved in that consultation, and if there are any difficulties with respect to interpretation or anything else, Mr. Clark is the individual to see with respect to it. It was good work to have representatives from all three caucuses involved in the meeting to discuss this, for the clarification of it all, and again to deal with, you know, the communications by members and how they do it. It's very, very clear – very, very clear – that in terms of commercial appearances members may not accept a fee, gift, or benefit for appearing in a commercial advertisement that is related directly or indirectly to the performance of public responsibilities. It also has to do with the filings that we have to make on an annual basis with respect to whatever it is. It's there for information, to make sure that all members are apprised of this. If members want to make a comment, we'll open it for such a thing at this point in time.

Mr. Mason.

MR. MASON: Yes. Well, I guess the concern I have is that advice is often couched very broadly and generally and requires lots of interpretation for specific situations. I'm just wondering how this is going to be applied. You know, our conflict of interest framework is very much oriented on pecuniary interests. Is it appropriate for members, including ministers, to appear in advertisements even if they receive no remuneration for doing so for companies? Or it could be a union; it could be anything that might be closely associated with that person politically. In other words, it could be a campaign donor, or it could be someone, a company, that might be closely supportive of the government or one of the opposition parties. Is that, I guess, covered? I don't see it.

THE CHAIR: Well, I think it is covered. A lot of this is common sense as to how you go about doing it. He does raise a whole series of things in here, you know, even including the media. CKUA Radio recently had its big anniversary. Well, okay, I'm the former minister responsible for CKUA. If I'd said, "Well, congratulations CKUA on your X number of years," am I in violation because I didn't say the same thing for CJCA or CFOK or CFCW? That's one of those commonsense kind of things that you don't know how to deal with. So that's why we've got the Ethics Commissioner to basically deal with them. What he's done in here is basically provided some guidelines, just advice with respect to how you'd want to do that.

I don't know, Mr. Mason. What do you think? If the AFL was having its 100th anniversary and Brian Mason said, "Congratulations on your hundredth anniversary," are you buying votes?

MR. MASON: If it was a commercial operation and I was helping them sell products and they were donating to my campaign, then I would really have a problem with that.

THE CHAIR: I think that's clarified that that's a no-no.

Other comments? This will be an evolving thing, and I'm sure that whoever the new Ethics Commissioner is with the competition that's under way, I'm sure that three months, six months, a year from now, there'll be something that no one's ever anticipated coming up. As long as we understand the clarification of the general with respect to that, we're okay.

The second item there, (b), is the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I've given you background in terms of that. The only reason I asked you to deal with this today is because on pages 24 and 25 of his interim report there's a section in there dealing with travel and expenses and, particularly, constituency offices. We've had some discussion on that a little earlier this morning. I just want to draw to your attention again – and I don't want a discussion on this report. This is not the place for a discussion on this report, the recommendations of it in terms of what constituencies, the size of them, or anything else. But there is text in there with respect to constituency offices and what people have said.

Basically, I want simply to draw to your attention – this may change in the final report, so I really hope that we're not going to have a major discussion this morning. It was there in the interim report. We'll wait to see what the final report comes from. There will be debate in the Legislative Assembly. In the meantime, I've also advised you that I paid careful attention to what the people were saying with respect to this and alerted you to the fact that one of the things that I want to undertake with you during this upcoming fiscal year is basically a review of this component known as constituency offices. I understand that you're generally supportive of that.

To bring you up to date, the Senior Parliamentary Counsel, Mr.

Reynolds, is here, again, not to go through the decisions or anything else but as a factual information thing, the Court of Appeal decision in Carter versus Alberta. I'm going to ask Mr. Reynolds to give us a verbal briefing with respect to that situation at this point in time.

MR. REYNOLDS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As you indicated, the Court of Appeal came down with its decision in the case of Carter, former Speaker David Carter, against Alberta on December 13, 2002. As members may recall, the essence of Dr. Carter's application originally was challenging the validity of the risk management fund, especially as it applied to the payment of funds to defend and settle a legal action brought against former member Stockwell Day.

Just to revisit what had happened, in his May 18, 2001, ruling, Mr. Justice Hawco of the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench dismissed Dr. Carter's application. He found against him. Dr. Carter then appealed that to the Court of Appeal of Alberta, and in a 3-nothing decision, as I said, rendered on December 13, they upheld the validity of the risk management fund as it applied to MLAs. Basically, that's where we are. Dr. Carter's lawyers had argued parliamentary privilege. Mr. Justice Berger, in writing for the majority of the court, held that this was not within the exclusive scope of privilege. He therefore found that the fund, as it applied to MLAs, was valid, which was what Mr. Justice Hawco had found. He found that the Assembly had delegated its responsibilities to the risk management and insurance division.

There is an appeal period, 60 days from the date of the pronouncement of the decision, to seek leave to the Supreme Court of Canada. There are media reports, and we're informed that Dr. Carter may be appealing or seeking leave to appeal. The deadline for that would be, as I count it, February 13, 2003, and I'm not aware of anything that has been filed at the Supreme Court to date.

11:00

THE CHAIR: So the bottom line is that there have been two court decisions to this point in time which upheld?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes, the validity of the fund and the general liability insurance for members.

THE CHAIR: So from a perspective of a third step, Dr. Carter and his people have till February 13 to appeal?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes, I believe so. That's 60 days from the date the decision was pronounced.

THE CHAIR: That's an update.

MR. MASON: Mr. Chair, that would require leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada; is that correct? They would have to find that the case was of national importance.

THE CHAIR: Remember our policy that we approved here on February 3, 2000, Members' Services Committee. I'm just going to repeat it again because I think it's really important and because I want to make a statement as well. In a nutshell, the process is that when a member becomes aware that he or she "may be subject to legal action," they will

- . . . notify the Speaker in writing.
- . . . notification will provide as much detail as possible related to the claim.
- Upon receipt of such . . . notification, the Speaker will meet with the Member and consult with appropriate resources, including Officers of the Legislature, regarding the claim.
- After reviewing the advice obtained by the Speaker during this consultative process, the Member will determine if a request

for coverage should be forwarded to the Risk Management . . . division of Alberta Finance.

- [The risk management people] will then evaluate the claim and determine whether coverage is applicable.
- If coverage is applicable, [risk management] will manage the claim from that point on.

Since we instituted this policy in 2000, a number of members have come to see me, exercised items 1 and 2, and they were given advice as to what to do, how to proceed if they chose to. It was entirely their decision as to what they wanted to do, and basically they've gone on. For the most part, my file has been closed after that. Some may have gone to risk management, and some may not have gone to risk management, but the matter was reviewed, dealt with, and no issues that I'm aware of. Actually the process is very good.

MR. MASON: This policy was instituted after the case that this lawsuit refers to?

THE CHAIR: Essentially, yes, but it had been in place before, and it was just reworded.

MR. MASON: Okay. Well, what sort of criteria is used to determine whether or not somebody's covered? Why, for example, would Mr. Day be covered and Ms Barrett not?

THE CHAIR: Well, I'm not going to get involved with that because I don't think that's appropriate, but ultimately the choice was for the member to choose something. You just shocked me there by saying, "Ms Barrett not." I had no idea that Ms Barrett had ever been turned down by anybody. So that's why I'm going to govern what I say.

MR. MASON: Okay.

THE CHAIR: That's news to me. Okay.

MR. REYNOLDS: I just wanted to add that I have copies of the decision from the Court of Appeal if anyone would care for one. Also, I should point out that the Legislative Assembly was not a party to the action. It was brought against the Crown in right of Alberta.

THE CHAIR: That's absolutely correct, and that's important. We're not involved. Okay. Thank you very much.

The next item. Well, a year ago Mr. Mason raised a matter with same-sex benefits. Last fall the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta passed Bill 30-2, the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act. I struggle sometimes in making sure that I really understand all of this stuff. For the process here this morning I want Mr. Mason to have an opportunity to have his say, but prior to that perhaps we can ask the Senior Parliamentary Counsel to just bring us up to date. We know that the bill was passed. From a legal perspective, not a debate on the bill or anything else, Mr. Reynolds, anything additional that has a connect for the issue that Mr. Mason is dealing with?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes. Well, because lawyers never give you the answer that you necessarily want, in response to your question I also want to point out that the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act also amended the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act, which is of interest, I guess, to former members, really, or a few of the sitting members. It changed the definition of spouse and replaced it with "pension partner," which is in keeping with the definitions used in the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act. Although this doesn't apply to the adult interdependent relationship partners, it applies to what they call the pension partners who

- had lived with the officer or former officer in a conjugal relationship
- (A) for a continuous period of at least 3 years, or
 - (B) of some permanence, if there is a child of the relationship by birth or adoption.

Of course, that is in line with an amendment that was made in Bill 30-2 to the Employment Pension Plans Act. So they're just making the pension plans equal, really, in line with the legislation.

With respect to the specific issue, as a result of the passage of Bill 30-2, it is our understanding that there will be perhaps amendments coming with respect to the benefits plans which are administered by the personnel administration office under what is known as the First Choice program, where certain definitions of qualification are set out in a ministerial regulation. It is our understanding that in line with the direction taken in Bill 30-2, when this act is proclaimed, there will at some point be changes to the benefit regulation concerning who may qualify as a dependent.

With respect to specific benefit issues, certainly, I'm not the person – Mrs. Scarlett would certainly be better equipped to answer any specific questions about the benefits than I would.

THE CHAIR: Brian.

MR. MASON: Well, yes, Mr. Chairman, maybe a couple of questions just to establish some of the facts and maybe through you to staff. As it now stands, people in long-term partnerships, whether you want to define them as same-sex partnerships or interdependent partnerships – and I'm not hung up on the language – do not currently qualify for the full package of benefits for their partner. The employee, of course, gets everything they're entitled to, but their partner is not eligible for benefits that they would be if they were in a common-law relationship or a marriage relationship. First of all, I want to clarify that that is correct.

THE CHAIR: I'm going to have to avail myself of the expertise provided by Senior Parliamentary Counsel because that's a legal question.

Can you, or do you want to respond?

MR. REYNOLDS: Well, if we're speaking in the abstract, that's fine.

Your question was whether the First Choice program applies . . .

11:10

MR. MASON: No. I didn't say anything about the First Choice program, Mr. Reynolds.

MR. REYNOLDS: I'm sorry, Mr. Mason.

MR. MASON: What I said – and this is an administrative question in my view, not a legal one – is: do people who are involved in a same-sex relationship or an interdependent relationship that is not a marriage or a common-law relationship have access for their partner to the benefits that we provide to our staff in our constituency offices or in our caucuses?

DR. McNEIL: Not at the present time, but in terms of Rob's comments there is a process in place to bring that into effect over the next period of time. It's our understanding that there is a process in place to do that in terms of ministerial regulations that are being presently reviewed and that at the time of proclamation of Bill 30-2 those ministerial regulations, we understand, will sort of accompany that.

MR. MASON: It's a bit vague, and it sounds a bit bureaucratic. I

guess my question is: do ministerial regulations set the remuneration package for our employees, or does this committee do it?

THE CHAIR: This committee does it, but on basic issues we have said that we would follow the decisions of the government of Alberta in terms of benefit packages and other things associated with employees.

MR. MASON: That's in process, and I appreciate that. So the policy decision has then been made that benefits for partners of interdependent couples will be extended.

THE CHAIR: We will follow through on what the government initiative is in this regard. That would be my understanding of what we would do.

MR. MASON: Or the committee can simply make the decision that these benefits will be extended; is that not correct?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR. MASON: Okay. Mr. Chairman, I guess, then, does my motion come forward automatically, or does it have to be remade?

THE CHAIR: If you would like your motion to come forward, your motion is on page 17.01 of the minutes of last year. The subject is same-sex benefits. There is a motion moved by Mr. Mason that "employment benefits for same-sex partners of Legislative Assembly Office employees be allocated in the same way as they are for common-law relationships." It was not seconded, but agreement was reached for Mr. Mason to table his motion to the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and that's where we're right now. So, in essence, the motion has been tabled. If Mr. Mason would like to move the motion again, I'd be happy to hear such a move.

MR. MASON: Okay. Then I will do so, Mr. Chairman. I will move that the Members' Services Committee direct that employment benefits for same-sex partners of Legislative Assembly Office employees – now, let me just clarify. That includes constituency and caucus staff; does it? Well, let me just make it in that way, then. Employment benefits for same-sex partners of caucus . . . Before I make the motion, I think I'd like that clarified. If I say "LAO employees," that includes all of the LAO and caucus and constituency?

THE CHAIR: Yeah. Under our management that's correct. They're all employees of the Legislative Assembly Office, so that covers everything.

MR. MASON: All right, then: that employment benefits for same-sex partners of LAO employees be allocated in the same way as they are for common-law relationships.

THE CHAIR: Exactly the same motion you had last year.

MR. MASON: Yes.

THE CHAIR: It's on the table. Do we have a seconder? Then we'll go to opening. Dr. Massey to second?

DR. MASSEY: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Open for discussion.
Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you. I guess I want to go back to the same discussion that we had the last time we raised this, which was that the government was working on legislation to try and address these issues on a provincewide basis. We just passed that legislation the first week of December. It's now the end of January, and regulations are being worked on and will be brought forward. I think it is premature to do this. I think we should be letting the government lead. I don't think this is an exclusive LAO issue that we need to lead on. I think we need to deal with the reality of what we've been working on for the last year throughout all types of public consultation and the work that was done to get that bill into the House and to get it passed. I would hope that we don't deal with this issue today.

THE CHAIR: We're open for discussion. I'm going to be pretty open with respect to the mere fact, Mr. Mason, that your participation will not close your opportunity.

MR. MASON: I appreciate that.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I really don't know why this is so hard. We continue to lag behind other governments, behind health authorities, school boards, universities, and a long list of private-sector companies that have realized that this is just a fundamental right of people. I appreciate some of the politics that the government has to deal with around this issue, but it's clear that we are way behind times, and the whole world is moving forward to deal with this.

It's been a year since I raised this, and I was asked to withdraw it on the understanding that there would be a meeting fairly soon and that the policy would be established, that once the policy was established and we knew where things were going with the government legislation, we would come back and we would deal with this. On that basis I was persuaded very reluctantly to withdraw the motion or to table it until this motion, but I am now feeling that the process that's being set out is vague and bureaucratic. I have employees that I believe are entitled to these benefits. They're not receiving them. I'm sure, given the number of employees in all of the sectors, that there are quite a number of others that are in the same situation, so I don't know why we can continue to justify discrimination. That's exactly what's being done.

It's a simple question. It doesn't mean that everyone is endorsing any particular lifestyle at all. It is simply saying that it is recognized in our society today that people have rights. This is one of them. I don't accept for a minute that we should wait for government regulations in an ill-defined process with no time lines attached and just put this decision off for another year or however long it may be. I think it's really up to the committee to show some leadership and do the right thing, and that's what I'm asking them to do.

THE CHAIR: Mr. McFarland.

MR. MCFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It probably isn't politically correct to say some of the things I will say. I find it really difficult as a member of this committee to separate myself from that as an MLA representing the majority opinion in a riding, but having been involved in the past in CUPE negotiations, ATA negotiations, I find it troubling that we tend sometimes to confuse so-called rights with benefits. These are things that tend to surface at times of negotiations when it comes to benefits, and I wouldn't look at same-sex benefits any differently than I would dental benefits for family members or time in lieu for grieving when it comes to employee benefits.

11:20

I have always maintained that there's a fine line between

providing adequately for the people that you've employed to do the job – that is, one employee being hired by a firm to do a job – and suddenly finding yourself 20 or 30 years later having been negotiated into the corner to the point that you're now providing 75 percent, for example, of benefits not only to the employee but to all the employee's close associates, whether it's siblings, spouses. I guess we have to be politically correct. It becomes a point of financial concern. For instance, if you go to time off for grieving, I don't think anyone here would ever deny that a reasonable employer, especially in a smaller firm, is going to tell somebody: "You've had a mother/father/family relation pass away. We want to make it comfortable during this difficult time, so take some time off." But I saw negotiations move to the point that ex-sons-in-law qualified for time that was paid for the grieving process.

Now, I know you're wondering what this has to do with same-sex benefits. Well, they're all benefits. They're not rights in my mind. They're benefits that are negotiated by an employee/employer relationship, and the sooner we separate and take the names off things such as same-sex or the definition of what a spouse or a former spouse is or foster children or adopted children – those even surfaced in negotiations for qualified time off. The extended family became so large that you ended up paying benefits directly or indirectly for just a whole lot of people that no longer did anything at all for the company, for the business, or for the fulfillment of that employee's job role.

So no matter how we couch this thing – and, again, this comes back to my original point as a member of Members' Services or as an MLA – I can't say specifically how I feel as a member of this particular committee, but as an MLA I go back to a survey that I did a couple of years ago in our constituency. Whether some people like it or not, marriage in our constituency was between two consenting adults, a man and a woman, and anything that smelled, looked, or appeared to be anything different than that, 97 percent of my constituency vehemently opposed. That is how my vote will go no matter how or when this particular issue comes up, and I don't have to apologize for that.

Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I've already recognized you once, Mr. Mason. This is not going to be a debate back and forth on the issue; it's going to be the process.

Any other members want to contribute? Mr. Ducharme.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to go back to my recollection as to what took place at the meeting last year. If I recall correctly, the discussion went more or less in the tone that the Justice minister was possibly coming forward with new legislation that was going to be taking place in the spring session, which went on into the fall session when basically the bill went out for further consultation with Albertans. I recall that the feeling that I felt went around the table at that time was that the decision was going to rest with Executive Council, or the government of Alberta, as to what was going to take place in regard to this legislation.

The legislation, the interdependency act, was passed in the Legislature. They're still going on in terms of further discussions as far as the regulations, et cetera, and I would recommend that the members vote in opposition to this motion until the process has continued itself.

THE CHAIR: Additional comments from additional members? I will recognize Dr. Massey because Mr. Mason has already had several – that will sort of end it.

DR. MASSEY: A question, I guess, to the government whip: is there any sort of a time line where you anticipate that there will be a decision made and the government will move on it one way or the other?

MS HALEY: Mr. Chair, I'm going to speculate in my answer here for you. There was a tremendous amount of work done on this, on the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act, last year, and as you know, it passed through the Legislature in the fall sitting. I have no reason to believe that the minister is not working at his best ability to bring forward the regulations. That bill was important to him, particularly, because he took a lot of heat, as you can only begin to imagine, bringing it through my caucus. I don't believe that he will drag his feet in any way, shape, or form on this. He wants to get it in place. So I can't give you a specific date. I can tell you that it is being done.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Mason to conclude the discussion on this matter.

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Well, I want to start by responding to Mr. McFarland, who indicated that there was confusion over rights and benefits. I certainly agree with that. The question of what benefits are received by partners of employees is a matter of negotiation. In other words, we don't necessarily have to have a dental plan. That's a matter for negotiation. We don't necessarily have to extend the dental plan coverage to a staff member's immediate family. That's a question for negotiation. But if we provide extending a dental plan to a spouse or common-law partner, then it is a right of same-sex partners to receive the same treatment under our package that a different-sex partner, if I can use that term, would receive, and that is a direct result of a Supreme Court of Canada decision which has directed Alberta and others to implement that situation. So, clearly, if we provide a benefit that's available to a spouse, then it is the right of a same-sex partner to receive that in the same way as someone would if they were in a common-law relationship. The whole process the government has been going through has been trying to painfully have Alberta law and practice conform with the rights that have been established in that Supreme Court decision. So it is clearly a right once you extend a benefit to a spouse.

Mr. Chairman, I would take the view that if the committee fails to act in this matter, then they are in breach of a ruling of the Supreme Court of this country which defines these results. It's fine for Mr. McFarland to express his constituents' view of what constitutes a marriage, but quite frankly it has no relationship to this decision. His moral judgment or the moral judgment of his constituents has no bearing on whether or not we as employers provide these benefits, just in the same way that discrimination against people based on their religion or their race is not allowed. People are allowed to have opinions; they are not allowed to discriminate in employment on the basis of those opinions. If they do, they're breaking the law, and I would submit that if this committee doesn't rectify this situation, it is breaking the law.

THE CHAIR: The committee has before it a motion moved by Mr. Mason and seconded by Dr. Massey that

employment benefits for same-sex partners of Legislative Assembly Office employees be allocated in the same way as they are for common-law relationships.

Would all hon. members in favour of the motion please raise a hand? Okay. There are three members in favour. Would all hon. members opposed to the motion please raise a hand? There are six opposed, three in favour. The motion is defeated.

I suspect that that will not be the end of the subject but pending

what further developments there are and the direction the committee would like to make with respect to it.

You have, hon. members, a document titled Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. After we made the decision with respect to Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament, a number of members came to me and basically said: "Well, what's an alternative? What can we do for an alternative?" So we came up with an alternative. Essentially, again, the purpose is to deal with high school students, to provide them with a greater understanding and responsibility as to the roles and responsibilities of the MLA both as a legislator and constituency representative, and basically to set up a mechanism whereby we would have two events, one on Thursday, March 13, and the other on Thursday, April 10, where we would ask groupings of 42 students and 41 students to attend.

11:30

What would happen is that we would have a process whereby a high school student from each constituency would be selected by their MLA to participate. The MLA would be responsible for canvassing schools in their constituency for interested applicants, and constituency assistants would provide the office of the Clerk with necessary contact information for the students so that preparations could be made. Once you determine who it is that you would like to have come and be with you for a day, then we will send in an administrative process to deal with that. We'll set up an event and a program, and we will attempt to provide an opportunity for the MLA and their office assistants to meet with the young person that's selected. Then we would have a lunch. The Speaker would provide an overview on the role of the Speaker. There would be a group photo. They would attend the Legislature, observe the question period. They would be given a tour. Then we would set up a mechanism for briefing meetings with government members, Official Opposition members, a third party member, and hopefully the media as well – the media was always very interested in Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament, and it was very much appreciated – to allow them to meet with young people to discuss the role of the media in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and have it all wrapped up in one day. We have a pamphlet that we've basically prepared and would then go with this.

The total cost for the whole program, the whole project, is about one-third the cost of Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament. I've got it outlined in there for you, and we've included it in our budget already. I think the budget overview was – are you going to help me there, Mr. Clerk?

DR. McNEIL: Ten thousand dollars.

THE CHAIR: Ten thousand dollars. Five thousand dollars for travel, if required; postage, \$500; labour, services, printing, materials, a thousand bucks; administration supplies, two luncheons, and what have you, a total thing for \$10,000. But the MLA would be the person doing most of the work in finding the young person, and it would be an educational experience. Okay. So I'll move on it this week and get everything out next week.

Under Other Business. Our policy of following what, in essence, we're putting into place – policies that either the Public Service Commissioner in the province of Alberta has with manpower things or the government with respect to other things – our policy basically is to follow in the Members' Services Committee; that is, rather than to be the leader. As an example, we don't give our employees 9 percent salary adjustments unless, first of all, that has been negotiated with the Public Service Commissioner. There is not so much a policy as a minute going back to 1989, and it has to deal with one of the most innocuous kinds of subjects you'd ever hope to have,

because I don't think it's ever been applied to anybody since that time. It has to deal with travel points accumulated by people, staff, in air travel.

In December of 2002 or the early part of January – certainly it was done with me not knowing it when I was doing this agenda – basically the Public Service Commissioner did a mail-out to all employees in the province of Alberta that basically says that in the past points collected on air travel could not be used for personal travel. The government policy was changed, and I don't know if it was part of a negotiation. Anyway, the bottom line is that public employees in the province of Alberta can now use travel points accumulated in air travel for personal use. The reality is that you can't do anything with the travel points. If you have a travel point card, I guess you can donate them to somebody, give them away. You can't use them for anybody else, and if you do use them for personal use, under the Income Tax Act of Canada you may be liable to have to pay income tax on the use of it. The bottom line was that the policy changed to basically say that public servants in the province of Alberta can use these things for personal travel, and that policy was changed. But we have a minute going back to 1989 that basically says that associated with the Legislative Assembly they cannot be.

Now, the government policy has changed. Our policy is to follow whatever the change has been, and my suggestion would be that to be consistent, we basically rescind that motion and apply the government policy with respect to the administration of this. I have no requests from anybody to do anything or anything else. It's just to be consistent. If you would agree to that, we could accept the motion and see where we go with it. Mr. Bonner moves. Mr. Broda. Would there be discussion with respect to this? The purpose of the motion essentially is to apply the consistency with the Public Service Commissioner of Alberta position on this.

MR. MASON: This applies to elected members' travel as well?

THE CHAIR: Under the LAO.

MR. MASON: I just recall dealing with this at the city level, and the

city council attempted to make a policy that councillors could not accumulate points, or if they did accumulate the points, they had to go to the city for general use since the tickets were paid for by the city because you were traveling around on city business. The airlines refused point blank to co-operate with that, and they said, you know, "It's something between us and the passenger." So it really came to naught, and I'm actually a little bit surprised that we've had a policy like that in place, because I don't think the airlines will follow it.

THE CHAIR: No. We've had a policy in place. It was moved by Ms Barrett on August 21, 1989. We've had it in place since 1989, but it is totally impractical.

Further discussion? All in favour? Opposed? Carried unanimously.

Would there be other additional business that hon. members would like to raise?

MS HALEY: I would really like to just go.

THE CHAIR: Well, that's not other business.

First of all, the date of the next meeting. We view it at the call of the chair in consultation with the members?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: A motion to adjourn. Mr. McFarland, Mr. Horner. All those in favour? Carried.

Thank you very, very much. Well, that's a bonus to get this concluded. Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. We've covered all the administrative stuff we had to cover.

[The committee adjourned at 11:38 a.m.]