

**Title: Thursday, December 14, 2006 Members' Services Committee**

Date: 06/12/14

Time: 2:01 p.m.

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. It was one year ago today that we had a meeting, so I'll now call the meeting to order. We have an agenda. I did circulate a memo to all members of the Members' Services Committee some days ago asking for additional agenda items to the ones that I had outlined for you. I have been advised that there will be two items that two members would like to have raised. Probably these two items will come under New Business under 5(b), Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates. Mr. Taylor, you wanted to raise an item with respect to postage, if I recall correctly?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes, I did. I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman, where that's going to go. It's somewhat speculative.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Perhaps under 5(b), Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates, when we come to dealing with the estimates? Would that be fine?

**Mr. Taylor:** Uh-huh.

**The Chair:** Mr. Backs, I understand that you want to raise an item with respect to the independent member in the Assembly, the budget?

**Mr. Backs:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** So that would come under the budget as well at that appropriate time.

**Mr. Backs:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** So in addition, then, to what we have in here, will there be any modifications to the agenda that we have? If not, could we seek approval, please? Mrs. Ady. Mr. Taylor. Approval given.

Now we have number 3, the approval of the minutes of December 14, 2005. Members will see that there are four items that the chair would like to raise as business arising from the minutes, but would there be other items coming out of those minutes of December 14, 2005? That being the case, could I seek approval for the minutes of December 14? Mrs. Jablonski. Mr. Ducharme.

Business Arising from the Minutes. The first one, 4(a). There was a question raised in times past from a particular member with respect to nonpensionable service for constituency employees: could they be considered as prior service for pension calculations on a one-time enrolment basis? We have a briefing note for you that says:

Yes, constituency employees are eligible to apply to purchase prior service for pension calculations. Over the last year Human Resource Services has worked individually with eligible employees, and as a result 64 applications have been forwarded to Alberta Pensions Administration for costing. The employee then reviews the costing and makes a choice as to whether or not they wish to purchase the service.

Our involvement ends at just about that time.

Would there be any comments or questions from anybody with respect to this? Okay.

Then 4(b). There was an item a year ago that I raised with you, guidelines that I thought were kind of prudent with respect to caucus expenditures. These guidelines were left with you a year ago, and

I asked members to take a look at them and see if they had any thoughts on them for improvements, clarifications, or the like. A number of individuals have basically given verbal comment to me, but I've received nothing in writing from anyone with respect to this. I'm just wondering if committee members would like to endorse these expenditure guidelines so we might go forward.

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Chair, if I might. I would like to make a motion that

we adopt the guidelines of caucus expenditure that are before us in the draft for discussion that was brought forward in December 2005.

**The Chair:** We have a motion by Mr. Knight. Do we have a seconder? Mrs. Ady. Discussion? The question has been asked to be called. Would all members who are in support of these caucus expenditure guidelines please raise their hands? Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you very much.

Item 4(c), Furniture Replacement Update, is simply information provided to you with respect to the project we have, outlining the development of the project in the various phases we've been dealing with. We're currently in phase 2, the time frame from April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007. You've got an update there, and there's the work plan to keep everybody up to date. Any concerns, questions? Then it's just simply filed for information as much as anything else. Agreed?

A year ago I presented you with a discussion with respect to members' residential alarm systems, and I basically indicated that this is probably the most open vocation that any person would have on planet Earth. When the Legislature sits, everybody knows. If they've opened the TV, they see you in the Assembly. They know you're not at home. A number of members had expressed concern to me with respect to security systems.

We've come up with, basically, a proposal for you. Essentially, we would allow members to expend up to a maximum annual expenditure of \$1,500 for a security system that could be installed in either the permanent or the temporary residence or both, and the funding for this would come from your constituency office allocation. So there's no request for additional dollars. It is an affirmative policy that says that if a member chooses to have an alarm security system, you basically go out, and there's varying flexibility with respect for you to find a vendor that is in your neighbourhood, in your community who can provide this service for you. Costing factors are then related to the LAO, and whatever expenditures there are are deducted up to that maximum number right from the constituency office allocation. So no additional dollars. It's a positive thing, affirmative, and if you're in support of it, I would need a motion.

**Mr. Knight:** A question if I may.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. Let's have a motion first of all, and then we'll have the discussion on it. Mr. Martin moves, and Shiraz seconds.

**Mr. Knight:** Just a question. The funds would be forthcoming from your constituency allocation, so I'm presuming, then, that you would raise a purchase order from that particular office.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Ady:** In here you say up to \$1,500, but it could be two different residences. Does that cover both residences, or is it per residence? You're saying: your temporary or your permanent residency.

**The Chair:** It would be per.

**Mrs. Ady:** So it could be up to \$3,000 is what you're saying?

**The Chair:** Yes, for both; \$1,500 per.

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Further discussion? We have a motion. Those in favour please raise your hands. Carried unanimously. Thank you very much.

New Business. We've always had a policy in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta that we would follow initiatives of the government of Alberta. It seems that in the early part of 2005 in the negotiations between the government of Alberta and its public sector unions there was a certain learning and wellness account established for government employees. Somehow this chairperson missed it. This fiscal year a number of people have moved from government service to working either for you as members in your caucus offices or your individual constituency offices, and they have started raising the question: "When I was an employee of the government, I could access a learning and wellness account, credit of up to \$500 per year, so I could get better or I could learn more. How come you don't have it in the LAO?" I looked in the mirror and said, "What is this all about?"

Our director of human resources brought me up to date with respect to the whole thing and included in your binder is, in fact, an extrapolation of what the government policy is with respect to the learning and wellness account. The bottom line is that each employee is eligible for a learning and wellness credit of \$500 per fiscal year to do and undertake a variety of things. You have in your document there an outline of the whole thing and particularly appendix 2, which basically outlines very specifically what is eligible and what is ineligible for such expenditures.

2:10

As our policy always has been to follow what it is that the government does – not to lead the government but to follow basically what the government does – I am recommending, in essence, that such a policy be applied to employees of the Legislative Assembly Office, and that includes all employees regardless of who or where they work with respect to the Legislative Assembly and constituency offices. It includes Members of the Legislative Assembly because we want you to be very, very fit, and we also want you to be very, very well. But you can see there what's applicable and what is not applicable.

**Mr. Martin:** You can save money in by-elections.

**The Chair:** Yeah, save money in by-elections if you're fit. That's right.

So for everybody this amounts to \$228,000, I believe, for a fiscal year, and I put it in for the budget beginning April 1. Remember that we had our budget this year to sit for 85 days, and we did not sit for 85 days this year. We have some dollars that we certainly have under the Financial Administration Act under policies. We are in a position to basically move on this as of January 1, 2007, so my request basically is that I think that we should do this. I'm recommending it, and I'm recommending that we, in fact, move in this fiscal year with this account and let all employees know that as of January 1, 2007 – that's my recommendation – they be eligible for this. Then when we hit April 1, they'd be eligible. This is an annual thing.

So if we had a motion and a seconder, then we could have a discussion. Mrs. Jablonski moves; Mr. Backs seconds. Discussion?

**Mrs. Ady:** Same question. Let's say that I have two employees in my constituency office and one here. Does that mean they're all eligible, and would we be adding that to each constituency budget, or would we be just taking it out of the constituency budget again?

**The Chair:** No. We would have a special budget for it. It would not come out of the constituency budget.

**Mrs. Ady:** And they would be applying to that budget. Correct?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Ady:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Backs:** This would just apply to full-time employees? What about part-time hourlies?

**The Chair:** Well, I'm not sure exactly. Clerk, how does the policy deal with that?

**Dr. McNeil:** It's our view that part-time employees should apply but on a prorated basis. We haven't worked out the details of that, but that would be the philosophy.

**The Chair:** We do have a policy on what's viewed as a part-time person. Cheryl, how do you define that or break that down?

**Mrs. Scarlett:** We have three different scenarios. We have those that work full-time. If I use constituency employees as an example, we have those that are working on a full-time basis, we have those that are working regular hours but not full time and are paid a monthly flat fee, and then we have those employees that are working on a casual, as required basis, hourly. So when we talk about prorating, we would look at those three scenarios in terms of trying to fairly apply the principles of the learning and wellness account.

**The Chair:** Mr. Backs, okay?

**Mr. Backs:** Sure. The second question is whether this comes out of the LAO budget or this would come out of the caucus?

**The Chair:** It would be a new line item in the LAO budget. It would not affect the constituency offices.

**Mr. Shariff:** I have two questions. One is getting further clarification about this process. For you to try and work out and identify every hour that the part-time people have worked and do a prorating, I'm wondering whether we should consider a two-level component to make it easy: \$500 for a full-time employee and \$250 for a part-time employee regardless of the number of hours.

**The Chair:** Okay. We've got a well-defined policy that's been worked out and is implemented now in terms of what this all needs because it deals with benefits and everything else.

**Mrs. Scarlett:** Our concern is to ensure equity amongst all staff. I guess if you go back to the principles of the program, we're wanting to ensure that we're setting out provisions so that all staff can continue in their learning and take advantage of initiatives that keep them well and healthy because, in turn, that will help us in this workforce and make us a stronger organization.

In the public-sector system they do have some provisions that exclude those that are working on a part-time basis. However, in our environment we're very unique in terms of the services that we do provide, particularly out in the constituency office. So the approach has been taken in terms of: we believe that the entitlement should be rolled out to all employees. The kinds of situations that we might have to look at: somebody who comes in that's working on a very short-term basis, for only one month, in and out, for a short-term project. But the majority of our positions are ongoing positions in support, and thus we want to ensure that we have that consistent support to our employees.

**Mr. Shariff:** So in that case, just for clarification, for those constituency offices that have people that you just described, who may be coming infrequently, hopefully there is some timeline at which a determination is done so that they know how much they're entitled to and are able to take advantage of that before the year is up.

**Mrs. Scarlett:** Yes. A guideline that could be considered that is outlined in the proposal makes reference that normally our contracts are at least year to year. If a contract was of a shorter term nature – that would be an example of a situation with perhaps a part-time employee – that would not apply.

**The Chair:** Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think this is an excellent idea, and I fully support it. It's very clear that this applies to staff, to constituency office staff, to caucus staff right across all parties and in the case of independent MLAs as well. Am I clear here? Does it apply to the MLAs themselves?

**The Chair:** Yes. Absolutely.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We want you slim and trim.

**Mr. Taylor:** I've got some work to do, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Ady.

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you. I'm just noticing your eligible and ineligible list. I'm assuming that this is a standard across government, the choices of the categories.

**The Chair:** It is. We mimicked it.

**Mrs. Ady:** You mimicked it. Exactly. So, for example, you could go to a fitness facility and train and do some of that, but you would not be able to consider golf eligible as a fitness piece. I think it's important that we note that this is consistent across government, what is in and what is out.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. This is the policy.

**Mrs. Ady:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** This is the policy. We're just plagiarizing the policy.

Okay. All those in favour, raise your hand, please. Those opposed? Thank you very much.

The next item deals with the other binder, the second binder that you have, which has the 2007-2008 Legislative Assembly budget

estimates. Now, I indicated a little earlier that there would be two additional things given to it, but if we could just go through that binder.

First of all, I will just deal with you on the budget preparation parameters. There was one dated December 7 that we had circulated to you in the binder, and then as you arrived here today, Jacqueline Breault provided you with some update sheets. So the Legislative Assembly of Alberta 2007-2008 budget preparation parameters that I will refer to are those found in a document that at the bottom of the page says December 14, 2006, 9:48 a.m. Those are the parameters.

Now, this budget basically is very, very similar to the last, formula driven on the basis of it, but if you'd just allow me a few minutes, I'll quickly go through this, and it'll give you the highlights in terms of what it is.

The first thing. In terms of an operational cost reflection, we looked at the Alberta CPI Monthly Economic Review. The last dated one that we have is October 2006, and it basically shows the Alberta CPI running at 4.7 per cent. That's a published document that comes from Statistics Canada, and we pull it off their website. So from an operational cost increase thing, we've used the figure of 5 per cent, and that applies to all of the segments that I'll talk about as we go through this in the next minute or two.

In terms of manpower adjustments, we have followed the policy that has been negotiated by the government of Alberta and the public service organizations that they have. It's the same as last year. I think they're in the second or third year of their various contracts. A 4 per cent public service scale in-range adjustment plus 3 per cent public service market adjustment, depending on, of course, whatever adjustments they have to do. It's exactly the same as last year. Nothing has changed in there.

2:20

Member remuneration adjustment. We used that 5 per cent CPI factor, which is what we have built into this. The member remuneration adjustment is based on the average weekly earnings index of Alberta workers in the previous fiscal year. We're currently in the month of December. The numbers that we have are always about three months behind. The last printed number we have is for August of 2006, and it's running just about 4 per cent. We have the rest of the year to go through – September, October, November, December – but we won't know until the last day of March what that number will kick out as for the fiscal year 2006, so we've used in here a 5 per cent thing on the full basis that whatever the real number is at the end of March, that's the number that will kick in on April 1. If it's 4.25 per cent, we will not give an adjustment of 5 per cent to members. It'll be exactly what that number is, and these dollars will lay in here and lapse. Last year we were almost absolutely right on with what it is.

Caucus budget adjustments. That operational/inflationary factor that we kicked in in the first point there, 5 per cent, has been adjudicated and adjusted right across the board into all of those things. The same thing for the constituency services element of the members' services allowance, the 5 per cent again. The communications element of the members' services one has been adjusted to reflect the number of electors. It's now \$1,982,843 as of March 2005. We get this information from the Chief Electoral Officer. There's also a 1 cent increase in domestic letter mail, we're told. So that adjustment number, because it's two times that, went from \$1.02 to \$1.04 for that item.

The promotional element. Based on the number of constituents we have – that is, the people of Alberta – the latest number we have is 3,332,225. So we made minor adjustments to reflect that as opposed to last year. The matrix element was adjusted by that 5 per cent again.

The transition allowance: the same number as last year, the \$4.2

million on the program we outlined a number of years ago as to where we're going. For budgeting purposes we're dealing with 85 sessional days. That's exactly the same number that we used this year, recognizing that this year we did not go 85 days, but every indication I seem to be getting from the little things that are coming out here in the last number of days is that we'll probably be sitting 85 sessional days in 2007. So we budget on the basis of that.

Members are entitled to an RRSP allowance. The federal government, the income tax people there, basically have adjusted that number for fiscal 2007-2008. Our share would be half of it. It would be \$9,500 as opposed to the \$9,000 this year.

The Fort McMurray allowance. Because there has always been that special little northern allowance for Fort McMurray that was negotiated between, again, the government and the public service union, the member from Fort McMurray said: well, if it applies to everybody else in town, why shouldn't it apply to people in my office? So we put that minor adjustment in there.

The temporary residence rate currently is \$150 a day. My proposal to you is that on the basis of everything that's happening, what everyone has been telling me about the cost of hotel rooms and the cost of meals and the cost of all those other daily things that you do, we put in an increase from \$150 to \$175 a day. So that is an increase in there. That would apply to all of the packages we have, including those from out of town who stay here when the session is sitting and for those who travel – is it five or 10 days that you have to travel? – about the province. That would kick in and apply to that as well.

The MLA kilometre rate remains exactly the same as it was last year. There's been no adjustment to the public service one. There's a 7 cents differential we've always followed in here. It is 43 cents for the public service and 36 cents for members here.

The next item, constituency office staff benefits. That was adjusted by 5 per cent over last year. Same kind of formula again.

The next section just deals with the continuation of these upgrade programs we have for photocopy equipment. It's on the plan we outlined several years ago. The security system: that's for constituency offices. The furniture repair one: that's continuing with what we had before. The next one, the furniture replacement program. Again, we're in the third year of a four-year one.

We pay a risk management insurance premium to Alberta Finance in the event that there are MLAs, Members of the Legislative Assembly, who may be sued and there has to be a case taken up. If there's a settlement, it comes under the insurer, in this case Alberta Finance. We pay an annual premium. The premium has gone up \$14,000.

To our knowledge there are two select special committees that will go because of legislation that mandates them to happen in 2007-2008, so we've got funding in for that.

There is a small amount of money because in the third year of our program we always set aside a few dollars in the event of something called election preparedness. It's about \$75,000 that has gone through about four different sectors in here – in financial management service, the technology side, the human resources side – and it basically would be set aside for wage employees. Needless to say, if we don't expend it, nothing happens. It lapses. That is just a pre-emptive, preventative kind of thing to basically put us in place.

Funding of \$228,000 for learning and wellness accounts, that I talked about a little earlier. We put that in there for the full year 2007-2008.

The last item, private member contingency funding, has been included to reflect the anticipated increase in private members in the government caucus. That's the last page that you have in the whole documentation. The Clerk and I were sitting and wondering: "Well,

okay. Fine. The message is that the cabinet would be reduced." We didn't have a clue when we guessed a number of days ago; we guessed five maybe. So the original sheet that you had that was circulated to you a number of days ago showed an item of five times 63. Now we know as a result of the announcement made yesterday that that should have been six times 63. So we set it in there. But now we can put it right into the government caucus because they're all government members.

So there in a nutshell are the parameters with respect to all of this. I can stop now and get any questions that you have from a policy point of view before we move forward to go through it in a little more minutia. If you have overview questions or if you want to raise anything else.

Mrs. Jablonski.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a question. I heard that there could be a possibility of us having a longer session than usual this year. How does that work when you've put in 85 days? If it happens to run over that, then what do we do?

**The Chair:** Well, first of all, we haven't arrived at 85. I think last year we had about 60, was it?

**Dr. McNeil:** Fifty-seven.

**The Chair:** Fifty-seven. So there's a flexibility there of 28 days. However, if we were to sit beyond 85 days, the Clerk and I would have to scurry dramatically to try and find funds in this budget and reallocate, and then we would have to make a request. Presumably we would know because the days would probably be in the fall, and we're assuming that there would be a session in the fall. Then there would be something called a supplementary estimate. We've never had a supplementary estimate under the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Never, ever submitted one. But that would be the fallback position. Or we just don't pay anybody.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** I'm not sure that would work.

**The Chair:** I don't think so. We think we're pretty safe with the 85. I'm not sitting here today advocating that there would be an increase beyond 85.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** General questions?

Okay. Then, Mr. Clerk, perhaps before we proceed, you might want to introduce the key managers you have with you today, whom we may fall back on and call on when we deal with these various estimates.

**Dr. McNeil:** Yeah. Maybe starting with the management of administrative services, Scott Ellis, the director; Jacqueline Breault, the manager of financial services; Cheryl Scarlett, human resource services; Senior Parliamentary Counsel, Shannon Dean; Louise Kamuchik, Clerk Assistant and director of House services; Brian Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms and director of visitor, ceremonial, and security services. There is Moyra Johnson back there, who's the manager of human resource services, and Jillian Tilley, who is the manager of information technology services. Have I got everybody?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Well, if you flip over the page in that first section, you get estimate comparison by codes, and you've had some time to deal

with that. If you want any explanation of any of that, we'll stop for explanation, or we'll move to tab 1, financial management and administrative services, and take you through it.

2:30

Then we go to tab 1, which is financial management and administrative services. Again, what you invariably will see through all of this, essentially, are those manpower adjustments based on that percentage that we talked about earlier. So what you've got here in this first segment is the human resource expenditure increasing by \$70,000 and the operational increasing by \$50,000, and that's simply to continue the implementing of our information and records management strategic plan. It's very, very straightforward. There's nothing new in any of this.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, I think I understand this. We've taken 5 per cent as the basis for the budgets, and certainly that's true of the caucuses. If I can look at the two together here, I have a question. In the second it says, "Human Resource expenses increase by \$70,000 to cover public service in-range and market adjustments" and so forth. There must be a difference, but they talk about the human resource budget covering \$92,000, and it seems to me that they're covering the same sort of thing, and I would just like some clarification about that.

**The Chair:** Did you hear the question?

**Mr. Ellis:** Yes, I did. If I heard you correctly, I think you were making reference to the fact that there was a higher than 7 per cent human resource component in the human resources branch area.

**Mr. Martin:** Maybe I'll explain it again. I'm sort of looking at the two: financial management and administrative services. Both of them or one of them, I think, are over 11. You know, they're well over 5. I understand that there's some extra cost. The specific question I had, though, is that in both of them it says, "Human Resource expenses increase by \$70,000." Do you see that paragraph? Then over in human resources it says that the branch's human resource budget is requesting \$92,000. It almost looks like it's the same thing. There's obviously an explanation. That's what I was trying to find out.

**Mr. Ellis:** Right. I think there are probably different factors in each one of the branches. However, similar things would be the market and merit adjustments, which we have included in our parameters, that being the 3 and 4 per cent levels. Similarly, there have been some reclassifications of staff within those branches that would contribute slightly to that amount. Thirdly, I believe that in the case of HR there is some election preparedness, additional wages being budgeted there. So that would account for those differences.

**The Chair:** Okay?

**Mr. Martin:** Yeah. It's hard for us. I take it that it's probably necessary, but when we look at the caucus budgets, we all have to deal with our own staff and recognition. It seems like there's a lot of extra here than the rest of us have to deal with. I mean, I'm not going to belabour the point, but it's not very clear to us, or to me at least, what the differences are.

**The Chair:** Well, human resource services. Cheryl, that's your section. Basically, it says that earnings increased. There's \$92,000, \$4,000 of which is increased costs for premiums and inflationary

adjustments. The second one is \$88,000 for earnings, but you had part of that you had in there for pre-election planning for wage dollars. Extrapolate that out, and it may very well be that we're just about right on the same thing, Mr. Martin.

Can you add further explanation to your \$88,000 figure?

**Mrs. Scarlett:** Correct. Of that \$88,000 approximately \$35,000 was targeted in terms of wage monies for the contingency in pre-election/election preparedness materials that we spoke of earlier.

**The Chair:** The bottom line, Mr. Martin, is that we're basically trying to apply the same thing equitably throughout the caucuses and the LAO.

**Mr. Martin:** Carry on.

**The Chair:** Okay. Does that cover us, then, for tabs 1 and 2?

The annual bloodletting with the office of the Speaker. You'll see the dramatic increase being requested there, and it is broken down exactly how it is. No bloodletting?

We go to tab 4, the Legislature Library. Once again, it is all broken down exactly the way the dollars would be. There are 16.3 employees there. The library continues to do very, very good work. I'm going to put in a brief plug today, but there'll be a bigger plug three or four months from now. In March it's my intent to basically unveil our centennial project that we've been working on in-house for over four years now.

Believe it or not, ladies and gentlemen, you are going to get a four-volume set, four separate books on Alberta dealing with the Legislative Assembly, people associated with it, including yourselves. Your names are in every book. We built them over the last four years. There are 2,800 pages now. They weigh 16 pounds. They're being printed in Edmonton by Priority Printing as the result of a public competition, and they are basically outstanding. You'll be very, very proud of them. You'll be proud to show your grandchildren.

It's all been in-house on weekends, after work. It's a love project. I'm telling you that the library people and the other associated people have done just an outstanding job. I'll really, really brag them up later, but that's where we're at right now.

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Chairman, on the operational side of the library it indicates that it's only 1.36 per cent of the increase, and it's \$30,000. In the footnotes that is "completion of 2006 Legislative Assembly Centennial activities." Is this part of that or additional programs?

**The Chair:** Which item are we talking about again? Sorry. Which tab are you looking at?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, I'm only looking at the footnotes here on the variance summary, in the spreadsheet here.

**The Chair:** Oh. How much money are we talking about?

**Mr. Knight:** Thirty thousand dollars. That is why I wondered. It can't be the books. So just a question to do with the footnote that says, "completion of 2006 Legislative Assembly Centennial activities."

**The Chair:** Probably the delivery, the mailing of them.

**Mr. Knight:** Okay.

**The Chair:** We have to circulate them because part of the policy was to circulate them across the country and Alberta to various libraries. Remember when I did that first book this year, which was a test run? I gave all hon. members a copy of the first centennial book we did, and I asked: do you want to deliver them, or do you want us to deliver them? Well, you know, interesting enough, half of the members said that they wanted us to deliver them, which I found really kind of odd when you give members an opportunity to go out and do nice things and meet nice people. So we had to deliver the rest. I'm sure that that's what we're talking about. We will. It'll take a long time too. Sixteen pounds each. Anything else on that one?

House services is very, very self-explanatory. It shows the human resources element. Basically, it's manpower, with 42.6 people, et cetera. The operational expense is in there. It says travel of \$34,000. That is not for members. That is for the participants in the MLA for a Day program. We help these kids come up from around the province. Okay?

Then information technology services. Please remember that we have a working team, with representatives from each caucus office and each branch of the Legislative Assembly. They meet, they talk about this stuff, and then they come and visit. I say, "I don't understand any of it, and I have to cut you back." Then they tell me, "Well, our members are demanding this," and we go through all of this. We're high tech all the way, and we've got a defined policy that basically says: renewal every two years. I haven't had complaints, by the way, from any MLA in the last year with respect to the technology side, so that's very positive. There must be good work being done.

**Mrs. Ady:** I'd just like to say that I've really seen an improvement in that area, and kudos to you for that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, it's to the people who are involved because I'm the first person to admit that I don't understand any of it.

The next one is the legislative committees. All the committees basically were to deal with and submit to us, and Members of the Legislative Assembly are chairs of these committees. Basically, we have the confirmation from them, and essentially this is where we're at.

2:40

Now, I'm submitting this on the basis of what I know today. I read attentively comments that came from the new Premier of the province of Alberta, who said that he would be proposing either a different set or a new set of legislative committees. If I understand correctly what was said and written, and I hope that I do, he also basically said that they would be all-party committees. Right now we know that we have an all-party Private Bills Committee. We know that we have an all-party Legislative Offices Committee. We know that we have an all-party Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee. We know that we have an all-party Members' Services Committee. We know that we have an all-party Public Accounts Committee. We know that we have an all-party Privileges and Elections Committee.

When everything settles down and we find out who the new Government House Leader is, and if the Government House Leader goes and consults with the various caucuses and there's general agreement on what kind of a new legislative committee system proposal there might be, and if that comes to the Legislature and the Legislature endorses it, we will then have to calculate budgets for them. But we're not in a position to even come close to that today, and we won't be in a position until the Legislature comes back.

We're prepared to be very, very affirmative in working with the Government House Leader and the House leaders of all the caucuses in terms of them arriving at what this new proposal might be. It may very well be that the Clerk and I will have to go through this and find some dollars in the interim until we have a supplementary budget, but I don't expect that to be an issue. If we have different kinds of committees, then we'll have a different structure next year when we deal with this. You have to deal with that. It's the members and the House leaders. That's the information that I have. You all read it as well. So here's where we are right now with that.

MLA administration, tab 8.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Chairman, can I take it back to tab 7? Just a question of interest: the sizable reduction in the budget for the Legislative Offices Committee from last year to this.

**The Chair:** Yes, and that primarily is because they finished their review of – who was hired last year? – the Chief Electoral Officer. There was money set aside for advertising and the review of all of that, so that would have been the reason why.

**Mr. Taylor:** Right. Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** MLA administration. Again, I've gone through the parameters associated with that, the 5 per cent and the other expenditures. You can see the breakdown there. The members' allowances: you can see the breakdown there in terms of moving from \$150 to \$175, and all the other items are per se. We completed the constituency office furniture provision for satellite offices, so that was just a reduction of \$5,000 with respect to that. Everything is either formula driven or matrix driven.

The tab that goes with that under Operational Expenses, where it says Travel. That is not travel for members to go beyond Alberta for professional development and things. That's travel within Alberta essentially used by the members who come from Calgary to Edmonton, who fly up for the Legislature, or members from Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray, where they have travel that they can use. People who live in Barrhead never ever fly; we just drive.

**Mr. Knight:** Or Little Smoky.

**The Chair:** Or Little Smoky, yeah.

So that's what it is. It's not special trips or anything like that. That's to cover whatever it is the members do. Any questions there? Okay.

Sorry, Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** I have to put my hand up a little higher, I guess.

Again for clarification, members' allowances are going up from \$150 to \$175 for sessional, nonsessional, and extraordinary temporary residence allowance rates. So that is for the travel, the five trips, 10 nights' or 10 days accommodation.

**The Chair:** Including that. But when you come up for session, you apply for that stipend. That would go for that, but that includes the other one as well.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes. Is this an appropriate time or place to revisit the concept of the number of trips that are allowed per MLA?

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. I don't have any particular proposal to put on the table. I'm just opening this up for discussion, Mr. Chairman, if you'll allow it, because it is pretty easy to eat up your five trips in a fiscal year and have many, many more trips that would be worth while undertaking, whether that's in roles doing caucus outreach generally or whether that's in our roles as portfolio critics in specific areas, visiting the stakeholders all over the province. I know that we certainly feel that we could justify increasing the numbers of those trips per year, perhaps doubling them to 10 with 20 day stays. I just put that on the table for some discussion if you'll allow it.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. This is the appropriate segment in which to deal with it. Our policy, basically, is that right now each member has 52 trips from their home to the provincial capital. In addition to that – is it five or 10?

**Dr. McNeil:** Five.

**The Chair:** It's five anyplace in the province of Alberta. What you're basically suggesting is that the five is too short. Yeah, it's wide open. Absolutely.

Mr. Lukaszuk, Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As a private member I would find it really difficult to justify. Why would I want to travel to any location other than that of my constituency and the capital, where the Legislature is located? Obviously, there's a reason for cabinet ministers to travel throughout the province as they govern the province of Alberta, but for private members, whose jurisdiction really is restricted to that of their constituency and doing business in Edmonton in the Legislature, I'm not sure why one would want to as a private member travel anywhere throughout the province.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, maybe there is a difference between a government member and that, but we all in the opposition have critic areas. I think we'd be criticized dramatically if we were sitting in Edmonton and we didn't know what was happening, say, in education in southern Alberta or Fort McMurray or whatever. If we're to be effective critics, we have to get around the province, and I think that's the point that the member was talking about.

I would agree that – I don't know what the number is – when you are travelling the province, it does eat up very quickly, and I certainly would be in favour of some increase.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hinman, as an observer to the committee.

**Mr. Hinman:** Yeah. Just a comment on it. It was mentioned that as a critic travelling around, it really does limit one's ability to travel and to hear these things which are to the benefit of Albertans that aren't always happy with what the government is doing and want to meet with the opposition parties. So it is a limiting factor. I think that we do want Albertans all to be heard, as our new Premier has said, and I would think that it was a plausible thing to increase the number of stays for opposition critics, that don't have the ministers' ability to do that.

**Mr. Knight:** May I comment?

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Knight:** I think we need to maybe clarify the fact that these five trips are airline tickets. You can travel anywhere you want in the province of Alberta and be paid to drive with your car anywhere you

like. So it's not that you're limiting people from moving around the province or that you don't get paid for your mileage to drive.

**The Chair:** It's the overnights.

**Mr. Knight:** The overnight things. I agree. You have these extra expenses with respect to hotels and meals; nevertheless, the five trips are airline tickets that we're talking about, correct?

**The Chair:** The five we're talking about here are basically overnight hotel accommodations.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Chairman, that would be, I think, a better way of defining these trips than whether or not airline tickets were involved because, you know, a trip from Edmonton to Lethbridge is certainly something that members could drive if they wished and do that comfortably within a day, but they couldn't get very many meetings under their belt in the course of that same day, and they'd likely incur an overnight stay in order to complete their business down in Lethbridge.

I'm not allowed to refer to committee members by name, am I, Mr. Chairman? I cannot remember where the hon. member from Edmonton – is it Beverly-Clareview? – actually represents.

2:50

**The Chair:** We can go by names.

**Mr. Taylor:** As Mr. Martin was saying, this does apply primarily in our roles as opposition critics. If I, for instance, in my role as the critic for Advanced Education wanted to get up to visit the folks at Lakeland College, which I haven't done yet, as a matter of fact, that would require certainly an overnight stay and most likely a trip by automobile to get there. I don't think we can necessarily easily fly into that area. So, really, in trying to define it in terms of whether you need to involve an airline flight to get there or not, I think that's a bit of a misunderstanding of what these trips are all about.

It comes back primarily to the notion of the ability to properly represent the stakeholders in the portfolios that we represent as shadow cabinet ministers and the ability to get around, especially if you happen to represent as an opposition member a couple of different critic portfolios. The ability to get around to consult with the stakeholders who you should be consulting with as part of your job is severely compromised by, I believe it is, a five-trip, 10-overnight-stay limit.

**The Chair:** Is it 10 nights or five nights?

**Mr. Knight:** It's 10 nights.

**The Chair:** Yeah, 10 nights. That's the number, not five. It's 10 nights.

**Mr. Taylor:** Five trips, Mr. Chairman. Ten nights.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Chairman, for clarification for myself. The critic portfolios: are those portfolios officially sanctioned by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta or by government?

**The Chair:** Well, government has nothing to do with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Those are caucus decisions within any particular caucus. It's a time-honoured tradition in the British parliamentary system to have critics.

**Mr. Shariff:** Mr. Chairman, I see some merit in the discussion that's happening here. In order for us to make better representatives, to make the right decisions for the province of Alberta, I think travelling and hearing from constituents from different parts of the region helps us. While I say that, I don't recall in the last 10, 11 years that I've ever used those five trips given to me. But I see some merit, and if that is becoming a problem, where people are not travelling enough to try and hear what Albertans have to say, maybe we should consider some adjustments and monitor it over time.

**The Chair:** Let's be really, really clear. You have 10 hotel nights over and above the visits to Edmonton, right?

**Mr. Taylor:** Right.

**The Chair:** Okay. There's unlimited travel in your automobile – well, up to the parameters of the 80,000 and the other number that we have for urban members. So the question basically is: should the 10 nights be increased? Is that correct, Mr. Taylor?

**Mr. Taylor:** I think it's more in terms of number of trips that I was coming at it.

**The Chair:** You mean air trips?

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, again, I don't want to tie this to airline flights because that doesn't really apply, Mr. Chairman. If you're going to visit with stakeholders in an area that doesn't have an airport, that doesn't have flight connections from Edmonton or Calgary, you're not flying.

**The Chair:** You're driving.

**Mr. Taylor:** So it is the number of trips because very often if you travel to someplace far distant from your home base or far distant from Edmonton, you're going to want to make the best of that trip and meet with as many people in that region as you can.

**The Chair:** I'd be very, very happy to have another review made of it. Would that be fine for today's purpose?

**Mrs. Ady:** That's what I was going to recommend, that maybe you guys put together some kind of a review and come back with some suggestions.

**The Chair:** I have no problem with that. We'd be happy to do it. We may not get it in this budget, but at least we'll get the thing started. Is that okay?

**Mr. Taylor:** That would be fine, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We'll do that, that whole package. We'll do a comparative across the country just to make sure that everything's in place. The objective here would be to provide the maximum opportunity for Members of the Legislative Assembly to provide service to the people of Alberta. That would be the objective. Okay.

Anything further, then, on number 9?

Well, okay. In terms of the next tabs – 10, 11, 12, 13 – first of all we'll deal with what we have done so far. The last section in tab 13 basically talks about six private members' allowance. This is based on the fact that the Executive Council is being reduced from 24 to 18. This will evolve here in the next couple of days. It may change tomorrow, but right now we're working on the premise that there's

going to be an Executive Council of 18, which is six less than today, which means, then, to the government whip that the number of private members you have right now, as of this morning, is 37. Presumably, tomorrow it's going to go to 43. So that's what this is premised on. Okay?

So in terms, then, of the government caucus, it will not be based on 37 times \$63,000; it would be 43 times \$63,000 for that number. That's based on that 5 per cent adjustment. In the Official Opposition caucus, it's based on the reality that your caucus reduced itself by one member, so this is based on 15 times \$63,000, 5 per cent added to that; the leader's office allowance, 5 per cent added to that; the Calgary caucus office, 5 per cent added to that. Then we get that bottom-line figure of \$1,450,000.

The third-party opposition is based on four members times \$63,000 and the leader's office allowance, which is 50 per cent of the Leader of the Official Opposition's office. The Alberta Alliance opposition service is one member times \$63,000 to get that. We have one private member to let me know exactly how he wants to be referred to officially, but he has time to determine that in the future, so we just refer to him as independent member services: one member times \$63,000. We have no vacant electoral divisions at the moment, so we don't have to worry about that. The last tab will be six times \$63,000, which no longer will apply. That is basically what we have done in terms of those four.

Now, Mr. Taylor, you wanted to raise a question with regard to postage, so I presume it's under the Official Opposition budget. Would that be where you would want it? It can go under any of this tab. We're on the budget now, but if you want, proceed with your item on postage.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Chairman, I think it would apply to all caucuses, and given the outcome of the discussion about extraordinary temporary allowances for travel, numbers of trips and the decision to review that, I think what I would be requesting here would be for a similar review to be undertaken.

It was proposed to me by our leader that I bring before the committee the notion that a postage allowance be incorporated into caucus budgets. Now, I know that that goes counter to the way we've done things in recent years, but my understanding, again in conversation with our leader, is that going back some number of years, probably now the better part of 20 years, I would think, there was apparently a provision for postage in caucus budgets back then which made possible province-wide mail-outs from time to time.

Now, I don't have any particular figures in mind in terms of what you'd want to put in the various caucus budgets, nor do I have in mind whether all caucuses should get the equivalent number of mail-outs or whether we should sort of do it on the prorated basis that we apply to leaders' allowances and so on and so forth or whether we should do it on the basis of numbers of members in caucus or anything like that. Just in doing a little bit of quick research in the last few days, because that's when the idea was first floated, we've come up with a figure that a rough costing for a province-wide mail-out to all households and businesses in the province would be, on a one-time basis, roughly \$104,475 at current Canada Post rates. Come January that would probably be slightly higher as well.

Certainly, with the proviso that if there is further discussion of the idea, by all means let's put this on the table too, I wonder if the membership is amenable to a review of that sort of idea and whether we would want to go down that road or not.

3:00

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Chairman, somehow it ties into my last question and/or comment. As a Member of the Legislative Assem-



bly representing one single riding and considering the fact that the Legislative Assembly is a nonpartisan, nonpolitical entity, why would I as a member for my riding want to extend literature and/or letters to the remainder of Albertans if it is not to have any political content in it? It serves me no purpose nor is it serving Albertans any purpose to receive a letter from me in parts of Alberta remote from that of my constituency. So if there is no political purpose to it, why would a legislative office or budget want to pay for literature that can only benefit one if it was of a political nature?

**The Chair:** Did I see somebody else's hand up here first?

**Mrs. Ady:** I was going to make a similar point. You know, in my constituency I have within it the ability to use the constituency budget for mail-outs within my constituency or whatever I do as a promotional piece. I'm a little hazy as to where we cross the line between political purpose and nonpolitical purpose here. So that's my question as well.

**The Chair:** Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think there's a pretty good general understanding on a constituency-by-constituency basis as to what is appropriate for us to mail out to all members of our constituencies using LAO funds to pay for that mail-out and what is not. I'm certainly not proposing that Mr. Lukaszuk or Mrs. Ady necessarily write a letter to all 3 million Albertans and send it province-wide. It would be for the Alberta Progressive Conservative caucus or the Alberta Liberal caucus or the Alberta New Democratic caucus or the Alberta Alliance caucus to engage in a province-wide mail-out that would be within the parameters that caucuses can work in now to communicate their policies and that sort of thing.

I don't know whether we're all in absolute agreement as to what constitutes political versus nonpolitical when caucuses do those sorts of things, but I do know that the Speaker's office will make that determination for us if we can't agree.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately.

**Mr. Shariff:** Mr. Chairman, you know, I see some very clear differences between an MLA responsibility and a political party responsibility. I want to make this point, that the allowance that we have for our mailing budget, which I think is about \$750 or a thousand dollars, barely gets you 300 to 400 mail-outs in a year. That is not even enough as far as I'm concerned. But when it comes to a political party sending out a mail-out, I think that belongs within the party budget itself, and I don't see why the Legislative Assembly should be paying for a political mail-out. So I don't have an appetite to even consider it. But I certainly have an appetite to consider the constituency allowance of \$750 that we have, which is not even 500 mail-outs in a year. It is very difficult in this day and age to be able to communicate with that kind of a budget.

**The Chair:** Others? Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes. I'll just respond to Mr. Shariff's comments there. If it comes to mailing out campaign literature either during or prior to the next election campaign, I'm in full agreement with Mr. Shariff that that absolutely is a party responsibility regardless of which party it is. In between elections, when the business of the Legislature and the business of the government is ongoing, each caucus has a responsibility, I believe, to communicate its policies and its points in debate to really a province-wide constituency, and that's where

I'm coming from on that. I see a very clear delineation between caucus communication and election campaigning and the communication of election platforms, which is clearly the responsibility of each party.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lukaszuk and Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is how I can probably tie it into my original question much better. My original question was: what is a sanctioning of critic portfolios in our system? You have quite rightfully indicated that it's a time-honoured tradition. However, I would argue that that tradition has only a practical application and ought to have only a practical application when the House sits in session. That's how opposition parties, I imagine, would divide questions for individual portfolios and individual ministers and focus their research time and allocations accordingly, and they should do so.

But during the regular year, when the House is not in session, and during our role as Members of the Legislative Assembly representing our constituents, our private member role is limited to that of our constituency, and whatever shadow portfolio we may want to have or whatever political affiliation we may have in any caucus is of very little significance whatsoever. When a constituent walks into a member's constituency office, he walks into his office as the MLA's office, indifferent of what caucus he or she may belong to, as we represent the Legislative Assembly in our caucuses and not particular political parties or government or nongovernment affiliations. Hence, it would serve me very little purpose to have the ability to reach the constituents of Calgary-Currie or any other riding, for that matter, being a private member.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Lukaszuk has a very interesting concept of democracy, that somehow we sit in the session for 57 days and are critics, and then all of a sudden we revert to private members. Of course, that's not the way it works. I mean, I'm not sure about the mail-out. I think it could be looked at. But the fact is that the Legislature, contrary to what some people might believe, is not nonpartisan. We were elected as different political parties to bring our views to the Legislature, both government and opposition. The critic areas are time honoured. You asked, and the Chairman correctly said that it's a tradition of British parliamentary democracy. If all of a sudden I'm Education critic, the day the session ends, that doesn't mean that groups aren't going to be getting a hold of me as the critic. You're the critic the whole year round until the leader changes it. The same with the cabinet: you're a cabinet minister until the Premier takes it away.

So I think we have to look at the critics in that way and from the previous discussion. If we want to take a look at the mail-out as being appropriate, I expect you'd have to look at the costs and that sort of thing because there's not an unlimited budget, of course, to do that. But this idea that somehow we're just private members after we walk away, that our critic areas stop at that moment, frankly, is ridiculous.

**The Chair:** Mr. Backs.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look at this proposal, and I find some problems with it because if you start to have mail-outs proliferating that are province-wide, they can be very expensive. You're really putting a charge on the taxpayer. What if the independent Member for Edmonton-Manning were to form the Dan Backs Edmonton north caucus. Then I would be in the same way eligible for province-wide mail-out in the proposal I've heard here,

and I think it would be inappropriate. In the same sense, I think that you have different sizes of caucuses and that it would be inappropriate for the taxpayers to fund full mail-outs, which are by their very nature political. We should be prudent in not going along with such a proposal.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Anybody else?

I will commit, however, to do a cross-country review of what the policies are in all the Legislatures with respect to postage and mail-outs and bring it back to the committee for its further assessment to give a comparison across the country. Okay?

The second item, then, that we have with respect to this is one that Mr. Backs wants to bring forward. Now, Mr. Backs, you had some paper. I've got four pieces of paper in front of me that were to be circulated. Is this correct? You've got a first page called the proposed amendment, and then you've got something else, 2007-2008 Legislative Assembly budget amendment, and then you have two sheets of paper with some statistics. Is this correct?

3:10

**Mr. Backs:** Not exactly, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Not exactly?

**Mr. Backs:** The paper that I have put through is just the one motion.

**The Chair:** Tell us which one it is, please.

**Mr. Backs:** It's the proposed amendment to the 2007-08 Legislative Assembly budget, and then there are two lines following it.

**The Chair:** Okay. Proceed then.

**Mr. Backs:** The motion is that

there be a fourth-party opposition leadership allowance of an amount and terms equal to one half of the third-party leadership allowance.

This was a request made to me by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, and the other materials were supplied by that member. This has nothing to do with the other independent member, being myself. If there's a seconder to this motion, at the pleasure of the chairman I would just defer to the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**The Chair:** So if I understand this correctly, Mr. Backs as a member of this particular committee has a motion, and he's moved the motion. He's looking for a seconder of the motion, which must be a member of the committee. Mr. Martin seconds the motion.

So now we will open it up to discussion. What we have, then, is a request from Mr. Backs that the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner – and he has circulated three pieces of paper. Is this correct, Mr. Hinman?

**Mr. Hinman:** Two pieces of paper.

**The Chair:** Okay. Two pieces of paper. One is the one with text on it, and the other one is a graph that says: '06-07 budget.

I will invite Mr. Hinman to participate.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had some interesting discussions on the role of opposition and trying to listen to Albertans, and this is trying to address that in another area, not

only with mail-outs and time to stay over in different areas of the province but also in being able to do the research, which I feel is the most critical and the most important. Basically, if you've read the page, it talks about in the past the leadership allowance and what that does on a per-vote basis. If you pull up the chart, you can look at the '06-07 budget. Because the Alliance opposition doesn't receive a leadership allowance, it really reduces the amount of money for research and is prohibitive in being able to share those views which 77,000-plus Albertans thought were important in trying to get a more equitable and democratic distribution and in order to listen to those Albertans.

Our new Premier has mentioned many times that he's interested in hearing and having a fair and equitable position for all Albertans. So once again we're asking for this amendment and hoping that the third time is the charm, to realize that this would be a benefit to the people of Alberta and to realize that as the political pendulum swings back and forth, perhaps the most important part is the funding for those ideas as Albertans view that they're not necessarily being listened to by the current government.

Thus, we have opposition parties, and you can see that the votes vary a great deal in those parties. The federal government has actually looked at funding the actual different parties on a per-vote basis, which is allowing parties to get up and running and for those Albertans to have an equal voice. Currently for the Alliance opposition it's a major problem in being a critic. Reducing from 24 down to 18 should be nice, but to cover all those areas and to have to be a critic and travel, whether it's covering energy, hospitals, health, or education, we need more research money in order to do a proper job, I feel.

The purpose of this amendment is to recognize a third party. Down a little bit further there are some cases where they've recognized leadership funding. I know that many people say, "Well, it doesn't meet the criteria," but that criteria has always been a moving yardstick, and the NDP have benefited in the past with roughly the same amount of voters that the Alliance Party currently has.

I'll just read the one quote from the April 30, 1997, Members' Services meeting. The hon. Rob Renner said:

My understanding is that there is some precedent in this province when we do have a third party represented in opposition, and that precedence has been approximately half of what the opposition leader would receive. In fact I understand there is even precedent, should there be a fourth party, that they would receive . . . a quarter.

That's what this amendment is, to receive a quarter of the Official Opposition. I think it would be of benefit to Albertans.

I do have a third paper that I was going to pass around – Mr. Chairman has it – just for some ideas, as Mr. Taylor has brought forward, to look at future formulas being presented. But, like I say, that's for further consideration. I guess I'd like to speak on that after some discussion on this, if there is any.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Ducharme.

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As Mr. Hinman has clearly indicated, it's the third time that the same proposal comes forward. I think we're all the same players around the table. It's been the same argument that's been presented. I think we just have to go back to the previous *Hansards* to see what the debate was that took place at that time. But my opinion has not changed at this point in time, and I certainly cannot support this motion.

**The Chair:** Others? Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps I'm remiss in not knowing this right off the top of my head. In fact, I did not know until about 20 minutes before this meeting that this proposal was going to come back before us this time. I would be curious to know once and for all and if possible beyond a shadow of a doubt the means by which this Legislature recognizes political parties once representatives of those parties have been elected.

There is no question in my mind that Mr. Hinman and several other candidates ran in November of 2004 under the Alberta Alliance banner. Certainly, they were recognized as candidates of a political party by the voters, and in one case enough voters recognized the candidate from the Alberta Alliance as the candidate that they preferred so that he actually got himself elected in Cardston-Taber-Warner.

I think an awful lot of clarity could be brought to this issue, Mr. Chairman, if we simply had a clear understanding of how this Legislature goes about recognizing political parties. There would seem to be some precedent going back to 1979, when the New Democrats elected one single member and got leadership funding there. I don't know the answer to this, but I wonder if you dig back far enough to a time when there was, I think, only one Alberta Liberal in this Legislature, what the rules were that applied there as well. Maybe there's a contradiction; I don't know. But certainly there is a precedent in 1979 with the then leader of the New Democrats, Grant Notley. It would seem to apply here. Maybe I'm unaware of some rule, however arcane or obscure, that prevents the Alliance from being recognized as a legitimate recognized political party in this Legislature. If that's not the case, then I can see no reason why we shouldn't support this motion.

**The Chair:** I'll answer the question that you raised. This has all been an evolutionary process, depending on the makeup and the time and what have you. Essentially, we've evolved the situation to try and get an equity balance with respect to what is and what isn't and try to make sure that there is fairness across for all individual members and the like.

We're governed by the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta. In the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta – and I don't know if anybody can pick out the clause or the section of it for me – it defines a recognized party in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta with four members. That's the act, that's the law, and that's what we're governed by. Once we determine that it's an official recognized party, then these formulas kick in.

I can't tell you the date as I sit here right now when that amendment was made, but I have been here 27 years, and there have been all kinds of formulas given at various times. We have tried over the years to get to the point where you've got a definition of what a party is: four members. I think that in the Canadian House of Commons it's 12 members for an officially recognized party. If you have 12 members, then you get certain status; if you have less than 12, you don't get that status. In our case, if you have four, you get that status; if you don't have the four, you don't get that status. All other members are viewed as independents, essentially.

I'm just giving you the factual information, as much as I can.

3:20

**Mr. Taylor:** So, Mr. Chairman, in that case, then, if I compare that to going back to 1979, when the decision was made to recognize a leader's allowance as being appropriate for a party with but one member in caucus . . .

**The Chair:** All I'm saying is that I'm not sure if the legislation was in place then. That's all I'm saying.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. So we may have evolved from where we were then to where we are now, that if the third party were to drop below four members in the next election, they wouldn't be entitled to a leader's allowance. Is that what you're saying, sir?

**The Chair:** Under the current statute we have, that would be correct.

**Mr. Martin:** I'm not going to take anybody to court.

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Martin, you should never say never.

I didn't want to bring a whole lot of paper in here to go over again because, as Mr. Ducharme says, we've already been through that. Just to note, as recently as 2001 the NDP were recognized with only two members, and there was a leadership allotment. So that four is certainly at the discretion of this committee to pass, and that's why I have been hopeful and optimistic.

Especially with a new Premier, I was hoping that his view of increased openness and democracy would be there. What's important is that democracy is equal opportunity, and that means equal opportunity for minority groups. If you're going to have equal opportunity, it's like being able to go to school: if the tuition is such that you can't go there, if your wages aren't enough, you're limited. We're very limited because of the funding to do a good job when we would do an excellent job with increased funding and have that equal opportunity.

As I passed around that blue sheet, I showed a few different formulas that perhaps would be more democratic in people's votes being recognized because right now there is no incentive for someone to vote for another party because there is no funding following that. But if you were to have that funding – for example, if it was \$5.50 per vote received – that would benefit all parties, and people would say: no, I want to vote for the Green Party because I want to see them get funding and have that. Currently, it's very difficult, and people say: oh, I can't achieve that level; therefore, I won't vote that way. But this would give the voters a voice in saying: no, I want some funding to go there.

Or we could go with the bottom proposal, where you'd have a leadership allowance, a private members' allowance, then also extra allowance of 50 cents for people that received a vote. I'm just trying to be more democratic in the people of Alberta's voice being heard and research being done on those ideas that they're proposing.

**The Chair:** We have before the committee now a motion put forward by Mr. Backs, seconded by Mr. Martin that reads that there be a fourth-party opposition leadership allowance of an amount in terms equal to one-half of a third-party leadership allowance.

Would all hon. members in favour of this motion please raise one of your hands. One, two, three. Those opposed, please raise your hands. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Defeated.

Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In aid of not having this come back in exactly the same form a year from now, I wonder if I could ask the chair to undertake a review of the rules in the evolutionary nature of this whole discussion that he was referring to earlier to determine whether in fact the 1979 and, I believe, 1997 rulings that allowed a leader's allowance to go to the Alberta New Democrats when they had fewer than four members actually predated the decision that four members constituted a recognized

political party. I would like clarity on that so that we know if and when this comes up a year hence what we're dealing with.

**The Chair:** I agree to do that.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'll give you a complete outline with respect to the whole evolution of this. It basically comes down to in this case the will of the Members' Services Committee but recognizing what the act says about a duly constituted party.

So, hon. members, are there additional questions with respect to this budget then? Because I need some decisions from you. The budget parameter, Mr. Clerk, that we've got there on page 1 of the first tab is \$48,696,000. Is that correct?

**Dr. McNeil:** Right.

**The Chair:** That gets us updated with the six additional private members. So that's basically the support that I need from you in terms of that first item. Could we have a motion to support the budget with the number of \$48,696,000? Mrs. Ady. Mr. Backs. Is there any discussion? All those in favour? That's approved. Thank you very much.

Within that, I gather I got indication of support from you with respect to the health and wellness initiative, that we can go with it on January 1? I think we got that as well.

Did I also get support from you to go with the temporary residence number as of January 1 instead of April 1 for this? I've got that as well? Okay. That's very good.

Now, what's this other one? This is the order. Shannon, is this the revised Members' Services Committee order that deals with everything we're talking about? This just is all the bookkeeping that gets everything in place?

**Ms Dean:** If I'm looking at the same document, Mr. Chairman, the constituency services amendment order, this is the one that gives effect to those changes in the allowances that you were referring to.

**The Chair:** That includes everything we've just talked about here: \$150 to \$175. Remember that the members agreed that it's to come into effect January 1, within this fiscal year. Your order says April 1.

**Ms Dean:** We'll change that to January 1.

**The Chair:** Okay. Everybody agreed to that?

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Chairman, before we vote, I notice on the third page under the temporary residence allowances that not only are we increasing the sessional and nonsessional and extraordinary from \$150 to \$175 a night, but we are apparently increasing the \$1,500 a month temporary residence allowance to \$1,750 a month. That is something that had no discussion beforehand. Am I reading it correctly?

**The Chair:** Really, it's the same thing because you're up to 10 days per month.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay.

**The Chair:** It's exactly the same thing. There's nothing new in that at all.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. If that's how it works.

**The Chair:** All agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. What else do we have? Has this been circulated? We'll circulate that one.

Remember, we had changed the Members' Services Committee orders. Shannon explained this. We went gender neutral on a whole series of other things, so there were some things that had to be changed that we've already done in the Standing Orders and what have you.

Please explain.

**Ms Dean:** There were some drafting changes made to the *Statutes of Alberta* effective 2000-2001, which basically amounted to renumbering, gender-neutral language: that type of thing. What's happened is that the Members' Services Committee orders have some references to legislation such as the Financial Administration Act where the section numbers are no longer correct, so we need to update those references. So in the order that you've got in front of you, there should be an attachment on the reverse side. Those are the references to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Financial Administration Act and the Public Service Act that require updating.

**The Chair:** All it is is making it consistent with the other ones. There's nothing new in it; it's just changing this one to that one. If we had a motion to do that, I'd really appreciate it. Mr. Martin. Seconded by Mr. Lukaszuk. Discussion? All in favour? Okay. We've got that one through.

We have a net expenditure of \$48,696,000, but the Clerk tells me that we need the total voted expenditure of \$49,224,000. Oh, yeah, we had revenue in there. So the figure should be \$49,224,000. That's the same as the other one plus the revenue. All members in favour, please? Thank you. Anybody opposed? This is good work.

Now, what have I missed?

**An Hon. Member:** Adjournment.

3:30

**The Chair:** No, no, no. I'm sure there's something else.

Oh, yes. I'm going to just circulate something for you just for your reference to look over over the Christmas time frame, what have you. You should be aware that in the Legislature of Ontario this week – this week – the government has introduced legislation to basically look at MLA compensation packages. Basically, what they're doing with the legislation they have now before the Ontario Legislature is going to an index. They are going to base the salaries of members of the Ontario Legislature at 75 per cent of a federal member's salary. A federal member's salary is \$147,700. So I'll just leave that for your information.

One other thing that I just want to do is to basically say thank you to all of you and to wish you all the very, very best for a happy and safe festive season.

We will continue to evolve this. We will do several reviews. We'll do a review, number one, on the trips as per Mr. Taylor's request. We'll do a review with respect to the question of postage allocations across the country as per Mr. Taylor's request. Well, they're all Mr. Taylor's requests. We've got a lot of homework. We'll deal with the question of allocation of funds for allowances for various leaders.

**Dr. McNeil:** Did we pass the order about the security system?

**The Chair:** We all agreed to the security system. That was part of three that we had in there. The security system one was approved as a package of three. All three of them were done in one.

Now, do we have a motion for adjournment? Mr. Martin and Mr.

Taylor. Will there be debate? All in favour? Well, thank you all very, very much. I appreciate that.

Now, don't anyone come and tell me that we've missed anything, Mr. Clerk. This committee is very positive.

[The committee adjourned at 3:32 p.m.]

