



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Members' Services

Wednesday, December 2, 2009  
10 a.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-1

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 27th Legislature  
Second Session**

**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Kowalski, Hon. Kenneth R., Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC), Chair  
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC), Deputy Chair

Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)  
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)  
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)  
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)  
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)\*  
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)  
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)  
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)  
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)  
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)

\* substitution for Kyle Fawcett

**Support Staff**

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Allison Quast	Special Assistant to the Clerk
Bev Alenius	Executive Assistant to the Chair
Louise J. Kamuchik	Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
Brian G. Hodgson	Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Cheryl Scarlett	Director of Information Technology and Human Resource Services
Scott Ellis	Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

10 a.m.

Wednesday, December 2, 2009

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's 10 a.m. It's December 2, 2009. Welcome to a meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Let me first of all say to the hon. members that normally my hope would have always been to give you at least two weeks' notice with respect to a meeting, but as a result of the Legislative Assembly in the fall of 2009 rising a little earlier than I anticipated – our standing order said that as a maximum it would go to the first Thursday of December – and recognizing that your schedules may not be the same as mine for next week, I basically put out the announcement last week for the meeting today. I hope that didn't cause anybody any difficulties. Normally your schedules would have you ascribed to the Legislative Assembly and your responsibilities to the Legislative Assembly until at least tomorrow, so I assumed that that would not cause too many difficulties. I appreciate you being here today.

We have an agenda. We've dealt with number 1, the call to order.

Number 2 is approval of the agenda, and the agenda is in the binders you have.

I have been notified, Mr. Mason, that you wanted to bring something forward, so we would deal with that presumably under 4(b), new business, or earlier. If you'd just advise.

**Mr. Mason:** Yeah, that's fine. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** Okay. We can put you down as 4(b), and then we'll see where we go with it in a few minutes from now.

Mr. VanderBurg, you said that you wanted to raise an item.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Two items: procurement process and IT services.

**The Chair:** We'll put down 4(c), procurement, and 4(d), IT services. That's technology, IT, right?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay. Would there be others who would like to raise an issue that we can put down? Mr. Oberle, did I see your hand?

**Mr. Oberle:** No.

**The Chair:** No. Okay.

We have 4(b). Mr. Mason hasn't told us what he wants to do yet, but we'll just let it go until he decides to tell us.

**Mr. Mason:** Do you want to know now? I'll just wait for your direction.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll come to it when we come to it, or you can interject if you figure it's more appropriate at another point in the agenda.

Then 4(c) for Mr. VanderBurg and 4(d) for Mr. VanderBurg.

**Mr. Oberle:** You could add me to that list, actually.

**The Chair:** So 4(e).

**Mr. Oberle:** Committee funding.

**The Chair:** Committee funding. Mr. Oberle. Okay. That would be 4(e), then.

Would that be, then, a satisfactory agenda? Can we have a motion for approval of the agenda, then?

**Mr. Rogers:** As amended, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rogers and Mr. Weadick.

Then we have approval of the minutes of February 4, 2009. The minutes are there. They were circulated before, and they've been circulated now. There were a couple of things on the last several pages of these minutes. I'll give you an update before we deal with approval, then. I think number 6, which would be on page 7 of the minutes, said: Long Term Funding Considerations – Broadcasting. I indicated to you that we had to look at this whole question of broadcasting of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We have done a number of things over the last year, and I'll ask the Clerk just to give us an update as to where we're at at the moment.

**Dr. McNeil:** Because of the deterioration of the equipment in the Chamber, specifically the cameras – and this was under our contract with the provider of services, CTV – we upgraded the three cameras in the Chamber. Members may have noticed that the quality of the picture during this past session was significantly improved from what had occurred before, but this is still equipment that's being provided by CTV. In the longer term it's still our plan to replace all that equipment with equipment that we purchase, and the intent would be to do that within the bounds of our existing budgets. So that would be the plan.

The document that was in the minutes from last year's meeting indicates that doing this will save us about a quarter of a million dollars a year. The payoff in terms of purchasing this new equipment would be about four and a half years before you get your return on that investment. So it's a significant financial savings over the long term to have the Assembly provide and maintain its own equipment.

**The Chair:** Does anybody have any questions with respect to that? Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Rogers:** Well, thank you. Mr. Chairman, through you to the Clerk. Dr. McNeil, would we then incur staff costs should we purchase our own equipment at some point in the future? Do we expect a staff component with that?

**Dr. McNeil:** That cost savings includes the staff costs, yes, but we're not anticipating that immediately.

**Mr. Rogers:** But in the future at some point?

**Dr. McNeil:** In the long run, yes, there would be staff costs for production staff and for maintenance of the equipment. Now, most of that would likely be sessional, so you would likely be contracting a good portion of those staff costs out, as CTV, in effect, does now, to a third party who does the production.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Others?

The other item was 7, Legislature Building media room. Mr. Mason asked me to review the current arrangements regarding who controls the media room in the basement of the Legislature Building. The government of Alberta controls the media room in the basement of the Legislature Building, and there's been no plan on anybody's part to change that arrangement.

Over the next several years, though, with the total reconstruction of the building beside us, there will be a major configuration of a whole series of offices and the way the services will be provided, so I think that between now and then there may be some adjustments made in that. But at the moment, Mr. Mason, there is nothing that has changed.

**Mr. Mason:** Then if I may. I think it's something used by all members of the Assembly. It's certainly used by the opposition parties. In the Premier's communications office they can hear everything that's going on in there. They've got it wired.

**The Chair:** So does the media, I believe.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes, the media does, too. It just seems to me that it's a service for all members of the Assembly, and to have it directly under just government control puts us at a disadvantage.

**The Chair:** Would you help me by explaining how it puts you at a disadvantage?

**Mr. Mason:** Well, you know, it has to do with having the room when you want it. Sometimes it's booked for extended periods of time, and we can't get it. So that's one aspect of it. You know, the fact that the Premier's communications office can hear everything that's going on in that room is also an imbalance. That's why I thought it would be better if it was placed under the control and direction of the Speaker, who could ensure that it's fairly allocated and used.

**The Chair:** Okay. Others on this subject?

**Mr. Hehr:** I actually think those are very valid suggestions being put forward. If it is a government office and if we're all supposed to have access to it, I don't know why the Public Affairs Bureau would have, I guess, monitoring outlets in that room.

**The Chair:** I think what was stated was that it was the Premier's office.

**Mr. Hehr:** Yes, the Premier's office. Sorry about that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Very good.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, that's what I think, and I think the other suggestion was very good, too. To just have a central booking location would be more impartial.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Could you give me a couple of real examples of times you tried to book it, you weren't accommodated, timing, what the circumstances were?

**Mr. Mason:** No. I don't have that offhand, but we have experienced that.

*10:10*

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Okay. So you have nothing?

**Mr. Mason:** No. I didn't come here with, you know, a diary of our experiences.

**Mr. Hehr:** Are you looking for an example?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** No. I was asking Mr. Mason.

**Mr. Hehr:** Okay. Well, I can provide one if you wish.

**The Chair:** Well, scheduling is always going to be an issue, but I understand what you said.

Anybody else want to add anything further on it?

Okay. Those, essentially, are the two items coming up. I think I did communicate something to you with respect to (e) on that same page, the website guidelines for Members of the Legislative Assembly, constituency offices and caucus offices. I'm going to basically ask members to review the document and provide comments and suggestions on the draft document, and one day we'll bring it back. We continue to evolve with this whole website business and the website guidelines and how we deal with them and the utilization of colours and identification and everything else.

We do have very, very clear rules in the Members' Services orders and the standing orders about how websites should be configured, designed, and what have you, what logos one can use, what terminology one can use. It seems, though, that whatever rule we have, we're just going right up to the edge of it all the time, and with innovation and so many brilliant people associated everywhere, it is amazing how we continue to be challenged in this area. We will be challenged, but we will also be intelligent about how we deal with this.

Members will recall that over the last year there has been quite a considerable amount of embarrassment by federal-provincial political parties with respect to cheques, identification of cheques, logos on cheques, and everything else, and the websites are not much different than that, so we'll use some intelligent caution with respect to that. You know what the rules are, and if the rules are touched, there will be a letter sent from my office and the administration of the LAO with advice as to how we might improve.

Is there anything further coming out of the minutes of February 4, 2009, that any member would like to raise?

**Mr. Oberle:** If I could just tag onto your last item there, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the websites and following the guidelines. As you know, we've registered mypcmla.ca as a website for our government caucus members. There was some issue around that because it contains the letters "pc," but the Alberta Liberal caucus has Alberta Liberal in their website name, as do the NDs. I can assure you that under my direction we've done everything we possibly can to ensure that our site, aside from the name, is nonpartisan. The reason for putting the name "pc" in it is that, I mean, we may want to one day foresee, God forbid, that the PCs wouldn't be the government anymore, but we would still be the PC Party. The Liberals and the NDs have chosen "opposition" in their titles, and I won't comment on that.

I would like to point out, though, that the guidelines also include that we are not allowed to have party logos or links to party sites or party colours in those websites, and I would invite you to return to those guidelines because they're not in fact being followed.

**The Chair:** It is a challenge, Mr. Oberle. That's why one day we will have a good, thorough vetting of this subject in a meeting.

**Mr. Oberle:** I look forward to it, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Mason:** But not now?

**The Chair:** The stuff is all out there for constant churning in the reviewing of this.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes. Well, it's an ongoing issue.

**The Chair:** It has become an ongoing issue.

**Mr. Mason:** I guess I would just like to say with regard to the comment – I'll just leave the rest – about "opposition," that's something where we're following direction from the LAO. If we put "NDP" without the "opposition," then they come down on us, so by adding the "opposition," I guess it's like adding "the government," and that is why we do it.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'll say nothing further on the subject, and I'll just wait for the next move in this chess game.

**Mr. Mason:** Nor will I, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** But we will be responsible under the rules that we have.

Well, then we might want to entertain a motion for approval of the minutes. Mr. Oberle. Anybody want to support him? Mr. Elniski. Okay.

Then we come to the major item of the business that we usually have in the late fall meeting of the Members' Services Committee, and that is the estimates for the upcoming fiscal year. You have, if I can just take you through this, a document that begins with an overview statement. Now, I had to be charged with coming up with a Legislative Assembly of Alberta budget for the fiscal year from April 1, 2010, to March 31, 2011. I have listened attentively to the developments in the province of Alberta over the last couple of months. We all have. We listened attentively to the comments from members in the Legislative Assembly, participation in speeches and everything else, listened attentively to what seemed to be signals as to where things are going.

We by the very nature of the Members' Services Committee meet in public. There's only one other Board of Internal Economy or Members' Services Committee in the country of Canada that meets in public, and that's Saskatchewan because they caught up with our model a little while ago, a couple of years ago. Everybody else meets behind, quote, the doors. So this is a very, very transparent, very, very open process that we follow.

The difficulty with the process is that we've also said that we will follow the policy of the government with respect to implementation of human resources issues and other kinds of issues, but we don't know what the position of the government is in all of these matters at this point in time. The provincial budget will come down sometime, if I'm listening to what people are saying, in the latter part of February of 2010. We could basically await all of this and do this after the provincial budget comes out, but our tradition is to do it before, so in essence there is a bit of guessing that has to go on with respect to the preparation of this particular budget. We may either be out in front of what the government may do, or we may be behind what the government will do in February. There is that risk thing that we have to deal with.

Putting everything together, essentially we have come up with a budget that basically is the same bottom line as the current fiscal year budget of 2009-2010. It reflects no change from the approved 2009-2010 budget. What are the parameters that we've outlined for you? Number one, the branch budgets do not exceed the 2009-2010 approved budget. It doesn't mean there haven't been a few adjustments internally, but the bottom line is the same. Operational costs reflect a zero per cent change budgeted due to inflationary factors,

and the Clerk advises me that the inflationary factor in Alberta to October 2009 is 0.1 per cent.

The average weekly earnings index. Mr. Clerk, I think you advised me the other day that to this point in time of this year – remember, the average weekly earnings index goes to March 31 of 2010 – we're looking at approximately 3 per cent, to that impact in terms of what has been happening so far this year.

LAO branch compensation rates will be frozen as of March 31, 2010, for all employees in the following classifications: senior officials, management, opted out and excluded, and excluded administrative support. This freeze will include general increases, in-range adjustments, merit increases, and annual increments. In addition, the achievement bonus program remains suspended at this time. This parallels what is being applied across the public service of Alberta. For budgeting purposes we're using again that 80 sessional days and 70 days of committee meetings are anticipated. Employer contribution increases for nonmanagement pension are approximately 3 per cent, and premium increases for dental and enhanced medical plans will be offset by cost reductions across the organization. No additional funds will be requested.

In terms of the MLA administration budget the MLA remuneration adjustment is zero per cent – the recommendation is that we will continue the freeze into the next year – no changes in the RRSP provisions in the Members' Services allowances order; no change to the Members' Services allowance formula, which is a constituency services order; no inflationary factor to the office operations elements; zero per cent market adjustment and zero per cent merit adjustment to the staffing element; no increase in the postal rate for individually addressed mail; an inflationary factor of zero per cent to the element in section 1(3)(c); and updated population and elector numbers.

Caucus and independent member budgets: zero per cent inflationary adjustment. Hold the line the same as they are.

We've had to add into this budget that \$351,000 is budgeted to support the Electoral Boundaries Commission; however, no additional funding is being requested. We'll find that internally, and we'll have to deal with it internally to get to the bottom line.

#### 10:20

So if you take a look at that and then if you go to the next section, which basically is the estimates summary, you'll see the estimates summary we're forecasting for 2009-2010. Again, we're still only in the first few days of December, but we're forecasting expenditures of \$57,886,000. That is our estimate, \$57,886,000. The estimate for April 1, 2010, remains the same at \$57,886,000. If you look at that document, you will see numbers in there that we have to deal with this year and that we are dealing with this year. There's been no provision, no opportunity allocated to the Legislative Assembly to ask for additional dollars through supplementary estimates or special warrants and/or the like.

If you look down to the section that looks at government members' services, where the budget was, the estimate that we had in the document for this year was \$3,939,000. That, basically, is forecasted to be less because of the change with two members in the government caucus mid-year and towards this half-year point. The dollar amount figure for the Official Opposition remains the same. The dollar amount number for the NDP opposition remains the same. However, as a result of the arrival of an independent member, dollars were reduced in the government members' services, and then dollars were allocated according to our formulas for committee support. So for both the Wildrose Alliance opposition member and the independent member we had to find \$164,000 in the current year to deal with that. Part of it came out of the government members'

budget, but the other part of it had to be found internally within the system because we did not adjudicate or adjust the dollars that were given to each of the caucuses for committee support.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission. The wisdom of the Legislative Assembly in the spring of 2009 saw a motion and the creation of an Electoral Boundaries Commission with a deadline of providing an interim report in February of 2010 and a final report mid-year of 2010. However, the wisdom of the Legislative Assembly did not allocate any dollars to this commission. So there being no dollars advanced to the commission, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta – the Speaker and the Clerk and others – have had to spend some nights and days, and this year we will expend \$858,000 from the current budget for the Electoral Boundaries Commission. We put in for next year, because this commission will conclude its work by mid-summer of 2010, an additional \$351,000. We're asking for no additional dollars to the budget; we're just reallocating internally.

Now, you ask the question: how could you reallocate internally? Just remember that the way we budget in the Legislative Assembly is that we budget in all of the provisions for, basically, the maximum of expenditures allocated. As an example, we have a formula that says that MLAs are getting a kilometre compensation figure. So we have 83 members. We determine how many kilometres they would put in. The reality is that that is the maximum amount. Experience indicates that we never reach the maximum amount. Some members do, those members who have no access to air to Edmonton, as an example, even though they may be fairly close to Edmonton. I'm thinking of the Member for Rocky Mountain House, who, I do not believe, ever gets in an airplane from where he lives, so chances are he would probably run up pretty close to the maximum allocation. Others will not.

If you look at that one and you look at the temporary residence allowance and some of the other allowances, invariably we never reach the maximum expenditure allocated. But we have to budget it that way in the event that everybody did; otherwise, the place would shut down. So we have these amounts of dollars that we return.

At the end of the fiscal year, March 31, 2009 – so that covers the year April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009 – we returned to the Provincial Treasurer of the province of Alberta in the first part of 2009 \$6.2 million out of our budget. That's how much we returned back to the general revenue. Members are very, very prudent about the way they do the expenditures, and so are we. So that was returned. If we would have needed everything, we would have needed that \$6.2 million, but we didn't, so as we always follow, we returned it. Essentially, one of the biggest numbers in the return was actually that the government caucus budget returned a disproportionately large amount of money compared to the other caucuses, that basically returned nothing. You go through this, and you'll find all of this.

We're dealing with that in the current year. If we look out to the next one, if you look at the 2010-2011 estimate, you'll see what those numbers are. If you flip over two pages beyond that, you'll see where the variances are. We've said that bottom line is what we're going to deal with, but look at the three items at the bottom of that page. I'll start from the bottom going up. It says 2010/2011 Summary of Budget Variances. There's text on it. It's in the tab that, basically, is called Estimates Summary. It should be the second page in there.

Again, we're going with the same budget this year as last year. However, we've added \$351,000 in there for the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I indicated that this year we will deal with the number that I just talked to you about, the number of \$858,000, plus next year's budget will include \$351,000 for it.

That's about \$1.3 million to the Electoral Boundaries Commission that no dollars were given to the LAO for.

In the past as well it was usual for the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission to be a judge appointed from the judicial system in the province of Alberta. The tradition was that Alberta Justice would pay for the salary of the judge.

**Mr. Rogers:** Was?

**The Chair:** Was. This year we received a bill from Alberta Justice to pay for the salary of the judge. Okay. It has to stop somewhere. The judge is going to get paid. That's 300,000 bucks that we have to come up with that in the past was dealt with by Alberta Justice, but okay. This is the last stop, so here's where we're at with it.

In addition to the \$351,000 you can see that in the caucuses the government members' services, the government caucus, has a reduction of \$135,000 because of two members fewer in the government caucus. But we had to deal with the formula allocation for the Wildrose Alliance member and the independent member. They get X amount of dollars for caucus support.

Then how would we deal with them with respect to committee support? Remember, it was a couple of years ago that we set aside X amount of dollars for committee work: whatever the figure that was agreed on for the government caucus for committee work, the Official Opposition would get 50 per cent of that; the third party in the House would get 25 per cent of that.

But what do we do with the others? Well, we didn't have any others last year, but we did have others in previous years. We had Mr. Backs and Mr. Oberg. So how did we determine that at that time? We followed a similar thing. They each have \$164,000 that has to be built into this budget. If you take those two numbers, you're looking at – what? – \$328,000 plus \$351,000 is \$679,000 that has to be added to this budget, that we have to find savings internally for.

If you go up the page, you'll see where those savings were found. At the top of the page for the human resources budget it's \$108,000 based on two items, including the major furniture purchases halted in anticipation of the move to the federal building – well, okay, we're not moving there next year, so we halted that and reduced that – plus the \$38,000 for the learning and wellness accounts.

My understanding, Mr. Clerk, is that, effective April 1, 2010, the learning and wellness account is frozen, put on hold, cancelled. Is that correct? Or we don't know yet?

**Mrs. Scarlett:** We don't know yet.

**The Chair:** Okay. So this is anticipation take-up, but there's a reduction there.

Fifty-six thousand dollars for a decrease in the amount allocated for external legal services based on actual experience and a decrease in *Hansard* printing expense and application of print reduction strategies: that \$30,000 plus \$26,000 together comes out to \$56,000.

**10:30**

We deferred some stuff in information technology services at \$50,000.

We looked at the actual cost of constituency office staff benefits and adjusted it to reflect the actual cost in terms of these benefits. Not all members had two people in their offices as previous members had had, so you have a reduction in there of \$50,000.

Office equipment and furniture. We reduced that expenditure by \$200,000. A 50 per cent reduction in the amount for barrier-free reductions in the constituency offices. This is an actual experienced item as well.

The MLA and staff Legislature furniture upgrades project is substantially complete, so we took out \$75,000 for that. The LAO furniture upgrades in anticipation of the Federal Building: well, that's another one, \$75,000.

Telecommunications. We believe that there were some savings reflected, so that was \$60,000.

Insurance. This is the fee that we have to provide to the risk management people of Alberta Treasury. That was reduced by \$20,000.

Along with the government caucus reduction of \$135,000 you get the reductions to equate the increases to get you back to the zero.

That's a quick overview. I'll stop there now, and we can go forward.

Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a clarification. That insurance number, the \$20,000: what exactly are we insuring there? It seems small in the larger sense.

**The Chair:** This is a reduction.

**Mr. Rogers:** Okay. So we're saving \$20,000 there, but what exactly are you insuring that you save \$20,000 on?

**The Chair:** Essentially, the Legislative Assembly has an insurance policy that the government has under the risk management organization. What does it cover? Well, it covers everything from if a member of the Legislative Assembly was to be sued by someone, they would have an access opportunity to go and visit with the people there and determine whether or not something should go forward. If you had a flood in a constituency office and there was dramatic damage to the constituency office, there would be insurance to cover the repair and the cleanup of that. Those sorts of things.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We've had experiences with both of them in the past.  
Mr. Lund.

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the first time I've had the opportunity to go through these budgets, so it's a little bit confusing to me. I see when we're down in the caucuses here where the government members' services has a \$135,000 reduction. That's for two members, the reduction?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Lund:** So that's about \$67,000. I guess that that's the average across government. But I'm really confused as to how we get up to \$164,000. Then I look across, and I see for government research it's about – what was that? – \$17,000 per member. Yet when we go a little fast forward and we get into the independent, \$96,000 . . .

**The Chair:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Lund:** Why the huge difference?

**The Chair:** Can I just delay answering that for just a minute or two? Perhaps I'll just take you through all these profiles. Is that okay?

**Mr. Lund:** Yeah. For sure.

**The Chair:** On the overview, then. You've got on the tabs, the financial management and administrative services tab, the same full-time equivalents of 13, same net expenditure of \$1,253,000. No variances there. Not much more to say on that one.

The human resource services tab, which is 2. You can see that there is the same number of full-time equivalents, 10.5, but a reduction to \$1,353,000. You can see a reduction in allowances and supplements that I talked about a little earlier, and then the office equipment rental and purchase line in there was reduced as well. That follows through with that. I might add that there is no full-time equivalency increase, there hasn't been in the 13 years since I've been the Speaker. The same staff component we had 13 years ago we have today.

Office of the Speaker: same bottom-line number, 3.5 people and \$550,000.

Legislature Library: same bottom-line number, 23.10 full-time equivalents and a net expenditure of \$2,763,000.

**Mr. Rogers:** Mr. Chairman, if I may just briefly.

**The Chair:** Yes, sir, Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Rogers:** I won't dwell on this one, but I'm just wondering: like all libraries with the advent of the Internet and a lot more research online, what's the experience been with the operation of our Legislature Library?

**The Chair:** Well, first of all, we have a very, very gifted group of people in the Legislature Library. Secondly, it has a lot of history and a lot of tradition. Thirdly, it's been very well supported by the Members' Services Committee in recent years. So we can get through.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The House services budget shows a reduction from \$8,437,000 to \$8,381,000 with the same full-time equivalency of 70.20. This is a very significant part of the whole budget because it looks after all the background stuff that goes with running the Legislative Assembly Office.

The next tab, information technology services, shows the reduction of \$50,000 that I talked about a little earlier with a continuous full-time equivalency staff measure of 16.

Legislative committees. This is a budgeted amount of \$2,698,000. It deals with all of the committees that we have in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. You have them all identified in there, including the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee, that was done. The Legislative Assembly also created another committee called the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee, which is to be done by the end of March 31. Once again it forgot to allocate any funds for that project, so we have to find those funds internally. Those are the budgeted amounts, and this is the support that goes to all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly in terms of the running of these committees and these offices: \$2,698,000, same staff component.

MLA administration. This is the one that deals with all of the payments and the allowances to Members of the Legislative Assembly. It deals with all of the constituency office staff benefits, essentially all the allowances for, again, the constituency offices. That comes out to \$30,457,000. That's a reduction from \$30,787,000, our estimate for this year. Once again it's identified where those changes would be.

Mr. Lund, then, to get to your question, under tab 9 we have these

other budgets called, essentially, the members' caucus budgets plus committee research support budgets. We have a formula that we follow to build the caucus budget. It begins, first of all, with a formula of \$67,407 for each member. That transcends all the caucuses. So if you run a caucus, and in this case the government caucus has 45 private members, it has \$67,407. It's less than it was a year ago because it's two members shy than it was a year ago. That \$67,407, if you flipped over to the Official Opposition one on the next page, you will see there's nine times \$67,407, so that gives that figure. If you look at the ND opposition, there are two members times \$67,407; they get that. Then if you look at the private member, the Wildrose member, and the other independent member, again it comes on with a base of \$67,407. So it's consistent across the board.

The next line that we have in there is the committee research support. When the decision was made several years ago to create these all-party committees over and in addition to the standing committees, there was discussion then about: how do you go about funding this committee research support? The dollars included in here are to go to hire people for each of the caucuses to devote themselves entirely to the committee responsibility. They're not to be used to do other work within the caucus. They're not to be used to do outside work. They're to be used solely for a very, very fine-line objective.

10:40

We decided: okay, well, how are we going to do this? After a bunch of discussion essentially we now have a figure for last year; \$770,364 was allocated to the government caucus. The formula then said that the Official Opposition, on the next page, would get 50 per cent of that. So if you look at the committee research support for the Official Opposition, they would then get \$385,182.

**Mr. Lund:** Forty-two thousand dollars per member.

**The Chair:** Well, in the case of the government there are 45, so I guess if you divided 45 into \$770,000, you'd get a number. In this case there are nine. If you divided that into \$385,000, you'd get a number.

Then the next page. The argument was: well, then, for the third party, even though you've got to have four members to be an official party, the committee decided they would give to the NDP caucus \$192,591.

Okay. Then we have the arrival and the existence of two independent members. How, then, do we deal with them? Should they have a committee research support budget? Yes or no? We didn't have this issue last year in the budget for 2009-2010, so we didn't have to have any dollars allocated for it. But we did have a situation, as I said earlier, that went back a number of years ago, and the decision essentially was to provide support for each one of them. So it's now 12 and a half per cent of what the total would be for the government caucus, and it comes out to \$96,296. If you divided one into \$96,296, then you would get \$96,296 for the average, absolutely correct. Okay? That's how that was dealt with.

Those are the two budgets you see for the government caucus: \$3,033,315 for the private members plus \$770,364, for a total caucus budget of \$3,804,000.

In the Official Opposition budget they get two budgets in addition to what we just talked about. They get an allowance for their leader. The leader has an allowance of \$466,498. That's to run the Leader of the Official Opposition's office. That's the purpose of it, to run his office. Then because in the past we made the decision to assist the Official Opposition for the Calgary caucus office, they get \$77,144. So in total they'll get \$1,537,000 for this year's budget.

In the next one, then, if you go to the third party, they get the private members' allowance that I talked about. They get the committee allowance that I talked about. But the Members' Services Committee in the past has said that they would provide to the leader of the NDP opposition, or the third party in the House in this case, an equivalency amounting to half that of the Official Opposition, or \$233,249, to assist the leader of the third party for his office budget. It's not for anything else. It's his office budget.

That's it. That's where it ends. Does that answer your question?

**Mr. Lund:** It answers the question of where the numbers came from, but it looks pretty generous when you look at the committee research and compare it all the way through. For the Official Opposition, if my math is right, it's about double what the government is. Then it gets way disproportionate when you deal with the ND and the Wildrose and the independents. It gets up to some \$17,000 for the government, some \$42,000 for the Official Opposition, and then some \$96,000 for the remaining. It looks pretty generous to me.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just following up on Mr. Lund, I can see where those numbers are kind of out of whack, and I'm looking to you for maybe a little clarification on how this grew. I'm assuming that part of that process is looking at personnel, the whole idea. I mean, it might be simple to suggest that you could use a formula, and then, you know, a particular third party or what have you would have a percentage of a person. But the reality, I suspect, is that part of the consideration was that people had to be hired in some of these places. I'm just wondering: was that part of how this came about?

**The Chair:** Well, the committee made some global numbers. I should add one other thing, though, just to repeat it again. I and the Clerk and the managers of the LAO will micromanage all of the budgets of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Office. The budgets that we do not micromanage and have difficulty even answering questions on are the budgets of the government caucus, the Official Opposition, the third party, and the independent member. We basically maintain a policy of keeping our noses out of it. So in terms of how many people – you know, somebody could be paying somebody in one of these caucuses more money than the Premier of Alberta makes. I don't believe that to be true, but it is possible that it could be. It isn't, so don't ever suggest that I'm suggesting something that I'm not. I don't know specifically. Now, I think the Auditor General one day will be coming down with some strong recommendations in that area, but right now we're going with it the way it is.

**Dr. McNeil:** When the policy field committees were created, those initial budget numbers came from an agreement among the House leaders who were involved in that process. The numbers you see there are just an inflation factor that was added last year. The original numbers were \$720,000, \$360,000, \$180,000, and \$90,000. Those were the numbers that this committee initially approved based on, you know, that understanding, agreement among the House leaders when those changes were made to bring in the policy field committees. That's my understanding of the history of those numbers. Not having been involved in that process, I have no idea on what basis those numbers were generated.

**The Chair:** I repeat: it was a result of this discussion that occurred among the three caucuses. They found a number, and that was it.



**Mr. Taylor:** Let us all remember, Mr. Chairman, that the number of committees remains constant regardless of the number of MLAs for each party. Representation on all those committees has to take place. All those committees require research and support staff, and I would argue that these numbers are fair on that basis and on the basis that Mr. Rogers was pointing out in terms of, you know, the need to hire people and so on and so forth.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lund.

**Mr. Lund:** Well, thank you. It wasn't my intent that we set off a big argument over them. I haven't been on this committee before, so I didn't realize – I'm really searching for where those numbers came from. Thanks to the Clerk and others for their clarification.

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Speaker, I think we probably have gone around the issue a couple of times and, you know, presented some viewpoints from all sides. I think it might be worth while to just park the issue for a few minutes because I'm actually going to address some more specific topics on it when my item comes up later on the agenda.

While I would point out that Mr. Taylor may be, in fact, correct with the caucus, that the committee numbers remain the same even though the caucus is smaller, it would be interesting to see whether that could in fact hold true for an independent member. For example, does that member actually participate in five committees? No. You know, our caucus budget is based on the fact that all of our MLAs share a leg. assistant. Why can't independent members do that? Those sorts of questions.

I don't think there's any harm in moving on right now. Let's deal with the issue at hand, our budget proposal, but I would like to raise those very concerns later on.

**The Chair:** Okay. Anything more on the budget estimates? Do you want to await a final decision on voting on the Legislative Assembly budget estimates pending these other items, or would it be appropriate to move now with a motion for support?

**Mr. Oberle:** I would be prepared to propose a motion right now, Mr. Speaker, that we move ahead with a zero-based budget.

**The Chair:** Is there a seconder?

**Mr. Taylor:** I'll second.

**The Chair:** Mr. Taylor. Is there discussion?

**Mr. Mason:** Does that mean approval of this budget?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mason:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Further discussion?

All those in favour, please raise your hand. Well, it's unanimous. That's my reading of this: unanimous support given to the budget for 2010-2011. Thank you very much.

Now, Mr. Mason, you were item 4(b).

10:50

**Mr. Mason:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I have copies of a motion that I'd like to make, and I'll just distribute some copies. I'd like to thank Parliamentary Counsel for helping me fix up my motion. The motion is basically to conduct a review . . .

**The Chair:** Just a second, Brian, till everybody gets it.

Okay. Mr. Mason, please proceed.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, this is a motion for a review of remuneration for MLAs, and I'll just read the motion.

Be it resolved that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services strike a committee at its next meeting to review remuneration, including pay and benefits, of Members of the Legislative Assembly and that

- (a) the committee be composed of Albertans who are not Members of the Legislative Assembly or employees of the government of Alberta or the Legislative Assembly Office;
- (b) the Speaker make recommendations to the Members' Services Committee prior to its next meeting concerning the terms of reference for the committee, including the number of members, and make recommendations concerning the membership;
- (c) the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and the Alberta Federation of Labour propose members to the committee;
- (d) in making his recommendations concerning the terms of reference for the committee, the Speaker must include the requirement that the committee take into account the workload and remuneration of elected members of provincial and territorial Assemblies in Canada; and
- (e) the committee is required to report to the Members' Services Committee no later than June 30, 2010.

**The Chair:** Mr. Mason has proposed a motion. Is there a seconder?

**Mr. Mason:** Do I need a seconder in committee?

**The Chair:** Well, we'll be very formal. Mr. Taylor will second. Okay.

Discussion now.

Did you want to add something first?

**Mr. Mason:** Yes. I'll just outline this. This has become an issue. At a previous meeting of the Members' Services Committee we approved an increase in compensation to MLAs based on increased workload because of the addition of the special standing committees to our workload. To me at the time that seemed reasonable, and in fact there was not any significant public concern at the time, but it was followed shortly thereafter by an increase in compensation for members of Executive Council. The decision of this committee was used as the basis for that increase, and that did create a significant public concern, a public issue, which has not entirely abated.

At the time I talked about an experience I had with Edmonton city council where a similar committee was appointed and that it wasn't entirely a successful exercise because, quite frankly, some of the businesspeople who served on that committee were amazed at how much work city councillors did for so little money. They came in with a recommendation that was very high, which the council at the time had to cut back because of public concern that it was too high.

What I've done in this motion to try to correct that is to specify that the committee is to focus its work on examining the workload of other MLAs in the country and the compensation they receive for that workload and that that's its primary focus. You know, it's not to draw comparisons with the private sector but to make sure that for the amount of work that we do and the compensation we receive for doing that work, it's in line with what is the case in the rest of the country. I think that this is going to continue to be an issue. I would prefer that we get a hold of it. If our compensation is well beyond what is the norm in the rest of the country, then I think we have to kind of face up to that and deal with it. If not, then I think it helps manage the issue in a better way.

That's my intention, not to prejudice the outcome in any way, but I think that given what's happened and some of the public concern, we have an obligation to conduct a review.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lund, followed by Mr. Oberle, then Mr. Hehr, then Mr. Weadick.

**Mr. Lund:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. As you know, I've been around here for quite a while, and if my memory serves me right, we've gone through this kind of exercise twice. Both times a recommendation came forward that government did not accept. The recommendations were too high.

I have real difficulty with this kind of a proposal. Just one quick look at it. You're making the assumption that all of the other provinces have got it right. I don't know how we could make that assumption without going to the private sector and looking at what they do and their compensation for what they do. Quite frankly, just from the discussion we had earlier, I think it would be more appropriate if we had the Speaker look at all of the compensation that is being paid for committee work and all of this sort of thing and the members' budgets for research and look at other jurisdictions to see how they're handling it, to see if this is fair or if there's some way that we could become more efficient in that field, rather than going down this road. I really am concerned that at the end of the day it doesn't matter what they come forward with. This committee has got to deal with it. This committee has got to make a decision. If it turns out to be the way the others have turned out, then it's just been a wasted exercise, and I couldn't support going down this road.

**The Chair:** Mr. Oberle.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to echo Mr. Lund's comments. I guess the intent of the motion to some degree is to get some outside advice and outside comparators. First of all, I would submit that if anybody is sitting at this table without the benefit of outside advice or outside comparators, then they're probably not doing their caucus or their province a service. Mr. Mason rightly deals with: maybe we should go beyond the pay to examine workloads. Well, if we just dealt with pay, we're probably sitting at about, if I recall, somewhere around fourth or fifth in the country in terms of compensation. We might stay the same or go up slightly. I think that would be a recommendation from an outside committee.

If we do look at workload, fine. Let's go there. Mr. Mason would know that we have a more extensive all-party committee structure in Alberta than do others. We have a more extensive public accounts process than do others. We actually run a Legislature where there's a very good chance of passing private members' bills, which is a large workload for a member. On a workload basis comparison we're going to rate, I'm pretty sure, quite highly. I can see it coming. The recommendation will be for another raise, as Mr. Lund has pointed out, as have been the recommendations of other outside committees.

The intent, I think, of this motion ultimately boils down to that somehow we should absolve ourselves of some of the responsibility for our pay, particularly when it comes to giving ourselves raises. I would submit that any way you slice it, we're going to be responsible. It doesn't matter who makes the recommendation. It's going to wind up in this committee. We're going to vote it, and we'd better have in our minds the justification for why we're proposing any particular pay stance, and we'd better be prepared to defend it. Now, Mr. Mason, I believe, voted for the last one, as did, I think, most of the people in the room, and I'm quite prepared to defend

where we were. Mr. Mason himself said that it seemed reasonable given the extra workload and everything else. It doesn't matter what you do. You're going to have to make the decision in this room, and you're going to have to defend it in the public arena.

**11:00**

Today my bet would be that if we went to an external committee, we would get a recommendation for a raise. I don't think what Ontario pays their MLAs has relevance to our current fiscal situation, our budgetary situation. I think we should proceed as is and consider whatever evidence we consider in this committee and move on. I think the current structure allows for that, so I'm not going to support this motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hehr.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I guess I would like to speak in support of the intent of the motion in that it's been a long-standing position of the Alberta Liberals, at least, that these types of recommendations should be made by an independent body. We said that on the record clearly before the last pay increase was given to MLAs. I believe it was actually the first order of business of this government that that happened. At that time I expressed some dismay that it actually did occur in that fashion. We'd signed up for the last election for X amount of pay, and we went into that election with that knowledge base going forward. I was very disappointed in that decision, and the record reflects that.

I also find the comments of the leader of the third party somewhat revisionist history in that there was no anger or dismay over the initial pay increase to MLAs. I find that somewhat self-serving. He voted for it along with the government. The Alberta Liberals said no to that as well. We voted against that process, saying that that should be coming from an independent body. So I do take some minor umbrage at that revisionist history.

Nevertheless, I support the intent of this motion. I don't know whether the framework is actually the best; that's to be debated. The intent of an independent recommendation as to what MLAs' salaries in Alberta should be is a very good one that I believe the Alberta Liberal caucus would support.

**The Chair:** I'm staying out of this conversation until the end.

Mr. Oberle, on this point, I understand.

**Mr. Oberle:** On this point. I want to point out – and thank you for the history lesson there – that the Liberals stated in the last meeting that they would prefer that an independent committee decide this, and I understand that, again, the intent to absolve ourselves of the responsibility that we were elected to have.

However, I would point out that this motion doesn't provide you with that. It doesn't give the decision to an external committee. It asks an external committee for advice, a process we've tried a couple of times. It hasn't worked. We had, briefly, a situation where mayors of two cities in Alberta were making more than a cabinet minister in the province of Alberta. What do you think an external committee is going to recommend given that situation? Then we still have to stand by and turn it down because we're not prepared to go there.

The decision rests here, and if you want to argue differently, then you're in the wrong room. We'd need to change the standing orders in the House because right now that's what this committee is charged to do.

**The Chair:** Mr. Weadick.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, having been in public office for many years at the city level, I know that this is always one of the most difficult decisions we have to make. I remember sitting on city council. No matter who makes a recommendation – you can pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to consultants – at the end of the day the people sitting around that table have to make that decision. That's exactly what's going to have to happen here. No matter what advice we get, no matter where it comes from, it's going to end up being here.

My belief is that we are ultimately responsible. We need to do some homework. I'm not sure if a committee like this is going to have any value at all, but I believe that, probably, getting some information from the Speaker would be reasonable. If I'm going to have to make that decision so that we know what the next group of MLAs elected in this province will get, then I think we need to do it with some understanding of what workloads are going to look like and what is happening across the country.

Although we don't have a motion to that effect, I think probably (d) really is the active part of this anyway. It says that "the Speaker must include the requirement . . . [to] take into account the workload and remuneration of elected members of provincial and territorial Assemblies." That is sort of the limiting item anyway. I'm wondering, Mr. Chairman: is that information that is fairly easily available, that you could get for this committee, that we could at least at that starting point consider that and then decide what process from there we may want to take, whether we strike a committee or whatever to deal with that information? Is that information available?

**The Chair:** Could I just reserve comment on that until the conclusion of this matter? Then I'll comment on all of these items, if you don't mind.

**Mr. Weadick:** Absolutely. Having said that, I understand the spirit of the motion because I know where Brian is coming from. But at the end of the day we have to make the decision. I'd like to get enough information to at least consider what process we should use and what that information should be based on. I'll leave it there and await your comments.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, speak in opposition to this motion. The hon. member, Mr. Mason, like myself had extensive municipal experience prior to arriving at this table, and it's no different, as he mentioned as well, in that arena dealing with salaries of elected officials. He mentioned, I guess, in speaking to his motion, his experience from his previous life, that the reality is that in most cases these outside committees, typically made up of businesspeople – its reference is the chambers of commerce here and so on – would probably tend to reflect something that is significantly more than what is currently offered at this table. I'm not aware of any members sitting around this table or any of our other colleagues from either side of the House who are here because of the pay. We're here in spite of the pay in many cases.

The idea is that we could rely on a committee that would somehow take some of the sting out of any decision that we might make at this table, that we will say: well, it was those guys. The reality is that not only are we required by the legislation and the standing orders that this committee make that ultimate recommendation, but as elected officials whatever decisions we make, we have to be prepared, as Mr. Oberle said, to stand by those decisions, defend them as reasonable people, and get on with the business that we were sent here to do.

Frankly, from my own experience at the municipal level and again here, this is never a topic that's easy to deal with, that's pleasant. But at the end of the day you have to offer some remuneration to people to do this job to encourage a wide variety of experience, people from different walks of life to take time out of their lives to serve the people of this province. There is a remuneration relative to that. So when we make that final decision, be prepared to stand by it and move on. This, I believe, is such a small piece of what we do that it really does not deserve the kind of long, drawn-out process that would be suggested by this motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to speak in favour of the motion, in support of the motion. Yes, I mean, it is ultimately our responsibility. This motion says that this committee would bring back recommendations regarding MLA remuneration and that the Members' Services Committee would still have the final decision on that. So the responsibility remains with us. It will remain with us, and if this motion passes and we go down this road, we ultimately will have to defend whatever decision we made, just as Mr. Oberle said. So I don't see that anything changes there.

What changes here, though, Mr. Chairman, is public perception, I believe, because virtually nobody else, certainly nobody who works for an employer, gets to give themselves a raise. Now, it could be argued that neither does the Members' Services Committee get to give the MLAs a raise – and, of course, we're all MLAs ourselves, so in that sense give ourselves a raise – because our formula ties in what we do to the average weekly wage earnings in Alberta for any given year as reported by Statistics Canada. Even at that, we've shown last year and again in this fiscal year coming up that we have the authority to say: well, we're going to freeze our wages anyway.

*11:10*

We would still have that authority, whatever recommendations would come back from this committee. But I'm pretty sure that if we took this to the doorsteps in our respective constituencies, we would find a great deal of support for the notion that it is better for an independent group of outsiders to weigh in with some recommendations on what elected officials should be paid. Parenthetically, I'll come back to this notion of our wages being determined by a formula. Our basic wages are. But our committee pay, that this committee voted on last year and that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I voted against, is not controlled in that way.

The way it looks to Mr. and Mrs. Average Albertan, to Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer is that we just kind of come into this room – true enough, we do it in public, which is a step above what a lot of other committees like this in other provincial Legislatures do – and we kind of say: "Hmm. What would we like to make for the next 12 months?" That's kind of how they see it. You know, when it comes to what we do for a living, perception is, to a degree, reality. If we are to be accountable and reportable back to our constituents, whether we're MLAs or cabinet members or doing committee work or whatever we're doing – and I recognize, Mr. Chair, having just said that, that we in this committee don't weigh in on the pay and benefits of the Premier and members of the Executive Council – we do our constituents a disservice when we vote ourselves our own package of pay and benefits without some obvious and very transparent, I think, outside weighing of the facts, weighing of the evidence, and recommendations to this committee.

Far be it for me to ever question the chair of this committee and his support staff's ability to do quality research in terms of determin-

ing the comparative pay and benefits and workloads of other members of other provincial or territorial Assemblies across this fine land of ours, but it doesn't hurt to have an outside source weigh in. The Member for Lethbridge-West has had experience with that, I believe, because that's the way that Lethbridge city council has done it. The proponent of this motion, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, has also had experience with that at the municipal level. Perhaps the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon has as well. I'm not sure about that. He's nodding his head in the affirmative.

Their experiences have been that committees like this, having weighed what we make relative to, you know, people who have the same level of workload and responsibility in the private sector, typically come back with a recommendation for a wage increase that is beyond what the public is prepared to accept at any moment in time. That's where we get to come back in and say: well, thank you very much, committee, for recommending that raise, but we don't think our constituents will stand for that, so we're going to vote ourselves something that's somewhat smaller. At least when we do that, we've done it in a context of somebody from the outside weighing in and saying: in the grand scheme of things, this would be a fair remuneration package for an MLA in the province of Alberta.

I don't think, Mr. Chairman, that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was trying to, you know, sneak in through the back door and find himself a nifty way to get around your zero-based budget for 2010-2011. I don't think he's trying to find a backdoor way to get himself a raise. I think what he's trying to do is walk boldly through the front door – and I would absolutely support him on this as this has been Alberta Liberal policy for more years than I've been an MLA representing that party – and say: here's the transparency and accountability that we can take back to our constituents and be proud of. And then we can defend our decisions.

Thank you.

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I need the previous speaker to consider the other side of this, which is, basically, an appallingly disingenuous argument. To appoint an external committee that we know darn well – the experience has been a hundred per cent – is going to come back with a recommendation for a large raise and then for, you know, the wonderful, altruistic people we are to say, "Well, we should accept some lesser raise," and then consider that that's going to be okay with our constituents because at least it's smaller than the raise recommended by that external committee is outrageous. Yeah, perception is reality. I hope that his constituents are reading the *Hansard* of this because there's a perception.

The reason that this is a difficult issue and why it has become such a difficult issue is because this committee never has the guts to deal with it on a regular basis. We sit for 10 or 15 years, and all of a sudden we're the lowest paid in Canada, and then we take a larger raise. Although in our current fiscal situation we haven't dealt with it again – and I'm in support of that; I'm in support of the budget the way it is – a more regular revisiting of salaries by this committee would be a better way to accomplish the goals here. But to suggest that we're going to have some external committee recommend a large increase and that because we're such wonderful individuals, we'll take some lesser increase and our constituents won't see through that, Mr. Speaker, is a strange suggestion.

**The Chair:** Okay. We're not going to have just one debate between two members. I'll recognize Mr. Taylor on this point, and then we'll move on to Mr. Elniski.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really must jump in at this point. Thank you for calling my name. I was busy looking for my crystal ball while the Member for Peace River was talking there about how disingenuous he thinks I am. I have no idea what the committee would weigh in with in terms of recommendations in the middle of a recession.

**The Chair:** Just hold on a second. Let's make it very clear. There is absolutely nothing in Mr. Mason's motion that says anything about recommendations. I read nothing in it. I don't see the word in it. It says: "in making his recommendations." That's the Speaker making recommendations. There's nothing in here about making a recommendation of any kind.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. Mr. Chairman, it does say that the committee would

review remuneration, including pay and benefits, of Members of the Legislative Assembly and that . . .

(e) The committee is required to report to the [MSC] no later than June 30, 2010.

I may be making a huge assumption here, but I'm assuming that this committee is going to come back with some results of their review, which would be recommendations, that the committee would then accept, alter, or reject outright.

In any event, Mr. Chairman, we are in the middle of a recession. If the Member for Peace River would just pick up the *Report on Business* this morning and read the article on what has happened to commercial office rents, he'd notice how those rents have gone down 21 per cent in the last year in the city of Calgary, and that is largely because of the number of layoffs and consolidations and positions left unfilled as a result of the economic downturn. I don't think a current private-sector committee is necessarily going to be all that keen on recommending a big, fat, whopping raise for MLAs while they're cutting staff, cutting salaries, holding the line on salaries, hiring at a lower rate than they were hiring at previously when the labour shortage was so intense. In fact, for all I know, they might come back and say: you guys are making 20 per cent too much. I don't know. We'd find out on June 30.

**The Chair:** Okay. Hon. members, other committees across the country have these discussions in private. We're having ours in public. It's now going in a direction that becomes pretty political, and that's not the purpose of the Members' Services Committee.

We've got a motion on the floor. I'm going to recognize Mr. Elniski, and then I'm going to recognize Mr. VanderBurg.

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it seems like it's only in government that we would want to go create another bureaucracy to deal with an issue like this. I mean, it has been stated here many times that the decision ultimately rests with this particular group. However we choose to get that information is fine. Whether you want to go create a whole infrastructure to provide you with information that we as a group should be able to deal with is fine, or alternatively you approach compensation experts in the private sector. I notice that some of our HR friends are here, and certainly they would know of the Hay methodology and some other things. You buy defensible methodology, if you choose to do that, and you've done your due diligence. We don't have to go out and create an entire level of bureaucracy to deal with an issue that ultimately is the responsibility of the members sitting around this table.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, I'm going to make some comments on my past life. I was one of the members that was taking a considerable pay cut when I took this job. I definitely didn't take this job for the

pay. But I have some experience with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. I've been recognized as business of the year. I've been a past president of the chamber of commerce. When I speak to my friends in the business world and tell them about the constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne being 12,500 square kilometres and driving 750 hours a year to service the constituency, to represent 20 communities, and to do the work that's required in this job, they always laugh at me about the pay.

**11:20**

I've only been re-elected three times to the Legislature, but every time during those campaigns to get re-elected, in pretty intense forums around the constituency, never once did I have a question about pay or overpay, and never once have I been judged on the pay that I receive. I've been judged on the work that I do for my constituents. I hope that we focus in on, you know, the work and the hours that we all put in.

When I look at the comparisons across the country, that my research staff has provided me, we're not the top pay; we're not the bottom pay. I'm quite fine with being somewhere in the middle.

This conversation has gone way out of whack, in my view. Let's look hard at ourselves when we work out in our constituencies. I've never once been asked in my constituency about being overpaid. Never once. Maybe it's a city thing. I don't know. But I'll tell you that I'm judged on the work and the response that I give to my constituents, definitely not on the pay.

**The Chair:** Additional members who want to make a comment?

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, I get asked all the time what I make, whether you get a pension, what this pay increase was for a year and a half ago. Maybe people on the street are interested in these sorts of things and judge an opinion based on some politicians, rightly or wrongly, in these processes. But I'm asked all the time, and I'm surprised that people in your jurisdiction aren't asking. That blows me away, frankly. But I take your comments at fair value.

**The Chair:** Mr. Mason to conclude the debate, then?

**Mr. Mason:** Please.

**The Chair:** Okay. Go ahead.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes. Thank you very much. I just want to address a couple of points here. I recognize that under our current system the responsibility for making these decisions is our own, and we can't escape it. But I think there's a well-founded concern in the public that we can't be objective about this. Rightly or wrongly, providing some objective advice I think would be helpful with respect to that.

The other comment I want to make, with due respect to Mr. Oberle, is that I really don't agree with his statement that we darn well know that they're going to come back with a proposal for a large raise. I've specifically included subsection (d) in this to try to make sure that that doesn't happen. I have been through the experience before. What the committee in Edmonton city council's case did was ended up trying to make some comparisons between elected office and the private sector, which is what Mr. VanderBurg is referring to. What (d) is intended to do is to make darn sure in the terms of reference that what they're to look at is the workload and the compensation of other MLAs doing similar work in the rest of the country. So I don't accept that under this proposal they're going to come back with a raise. I think they'll come back with something which I hope that we in this committee and the public would agree

is an objective and disinterested assessment. I think that that's what the public is asking for at this time.

**The Chair:** Any additional member? Well, I guess that Mr. Mason has closed it.

Mr. Mason has proposed a motion. All members have it in front of them. Would all hon. members supportive of the motion please raise a hand? All those opposed to the motion, please raise a hand. The motion is defeated.

Now, I deliberately stayed out of the discussion as a good chairman should stay out of the discussion. Can I make a few comments?

**Hon. Members:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Are you sure you want them?

This is probably one of the most difficult areas that we've always had to deal with. My experience in this matter is 30 years. Some people refer to me in a very denigrating way as a career politician, some as an old horse that's been around here way too long and all the rest of that stuff. They can call me all the names they want in the world. These are essentially people in the media and a few others.

The fact of the matter is that this is one of the most difficult subjects that anybody in a democratic society has to deal with regardless of which level of government you are: municipal, provincial, or federal. Despite all of the things, we must abide by the law which we have, and the law of Alberta is the Legislative Assembly Act. That's what I was sworn to do, and that's what everybody in this room was sworn to do. Section 21 and section 39 of the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta very, very clearly give the authority. This act was not just done a few years ago. This goes back, basically, prior to 1983, when the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta was created. Prior to that, it came out of one part of the building. So these committees have dealt with this before.

Now, I'm not taking sides in any of this, but my experience is that every time there has ever been a report that we've asked for or somebody else has asked for, they have come back with whopping increases. I got elected on the 21st day of November 1979, and 14 days before that, on November 7, 1979, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta gave itself a 50 per cent wage increase, midway through a by-election that I was a candidate in, as a result of a report from an outside committee chaired by a judge. I won that election despite the fact that the government gave itself a 50 per cent increase.

In 1994 we had another report, an outside report, that basically said that cabinet ministers should make \$250,000 a year. Where did that idea come from? You know what was done with that report? Shredded. Well, it's there someplace. Every darned report has come back. So that's number one.

Number two. If somebody wants to change the act in the province of Alberta, if it's somebody's political policy that this is what we have to go with, we'll change sections 39 and 21 of the Legislative Assembly Act. We'll look forward to seeing the legislation come forward next spring.

No outside committee can make any decision. It's coming back to this committee. We can run, but we can't hide.

Will all members support the conclusions? We tried that one time. We had an outside committee come in, and all the members said that they were going to support what the recommendations were in the report. The report came back, and all of a sudden, bang, in four different directions. So much for that theory.

Mr. Mason, could you tell me how we would equate workloads and how somebody could do this? Mr. Lund, who represents Rocky Mountain House, does not have access to air. Mrs. Leskiw, who

represents Bonnyville-Cold Lake, does not have access to air. Mr. VanderBurg, who represents Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, does not have access to air. When they come back and forth, they have to drive, essentially. Other people live in the city of Edmonton just a few miles away from where the Legislature Building is. If we have a provision that provides for assistance to members for up to 80,000 kilometres per year in travel, these are not joy rides. These are not going on sightseeing tours. This is hustling in the middle of the night through a snowstorm on snowy and icy roads. If you can average more than 100 kilometres per hour in your car, I'd like to talk to you.

**An Hon. Member:** So would the sheriffs.

**The Chair:** Yeah. So would the sheriffs.

So you have 80,000 kilometres per year, and if you average 100 kilometres per hour, you're in your car for 800 hours per year. If you work 50 hours a week, 50 into 800 hours gets to be – what? How many is it? What's 50 into 800?

**An Hon. Member:** Forty.

**The Chair:** Forty? Forty. Isn't that amazing?

**An Hon. Member:** Twenty.

**The Chair:** What is it? Have we got 20? We all agree on 20? That's 20 weeks per year.

**Some Hon. Members:** It's 16.

**The Chair:** Okay. It's 16. We finally got it. That's four months per year that you're sitting in your car. I want to put that in the workload comparison to the MLA for Edmonton-Centre, who lives two miles from the Legislature Building, or the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar or the MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**11:30**

**Mr. Mason:** It's a 15-minute drive for me.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay. As compared to the four months per year in the car. You can't use cellphones because it's quite dangerous. As you all know, I'm doing a comparison anyway, but I'm going to add this workload thing into it, and it's going to show that some member has got three and a half months more time to work on constituency-related business than some of the members I talked about. We're going to do that comparison in the workload that I'm going to do. I'm always doing this stuff anyway, but you just gave me a new idea to finally articulate the difference in the whole thing. Maybe the recommendation is, then, that X MLAs who have to work that much harder should be getting compensated. We should have, you know, A list, B list, C list, D list.

Anybody who is embarrassed about what they get paid should return the cheque, and they can return the cheque in one of two ways: either directly through the Provincial Treasurer, or send it to me and I'll make sure it becomes public. I have yet to get one of these cheques returned in the years that I've been the Speaker. You know, in other jurisdictions they don't have this kind of stuff, but let's keep the politics out of this, for crying out loud. It's called democracy, and we have to make sure that people from all walks of life can participate.

Let me tell you: I personally do not get accosted, Mr. Hehr, about

this matter – and I've run nine times in nine elections – ever. That's the difference, I guess, in where we live.

Okay. Mr. VanderBurg, you had an item on procurement.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, members, I have some issues with the way we purchase goods. You know, we are using right now purchase orders.

**The Chair:** You mean the Legislative Assembly of Alberta?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Right.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** We also have the ability to use a credit card for some instances. I'm wondering if the Speaker could provide an analysis of what it does cost us as members to use purchase orders versus what it could cost us – and I'm assuming it would cost us less – if we had a greater ability to use our credit cards for purchasing goods for constituency business. It might be office supplies, toilet paper. It might be a plaque for a constituent. I don't really know the cost, but I'm assuming. Coming from my past business experience, most businesses now have eliminated the use of purchase orders and have given greater ability to their staff and to management to use credit cards.

As well, some businesses have been very innovative in using a business card tied to air miles that allows those businesses to send staff and management on air miles service to destinations that they can use to further their knowledge, maybe a convention or a further education course. I'm wondering if there's that opportunity to have a look at it to see if maybe we're missing something, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay. Fair game. I'll have the people look at all that. The one thing, Mr. VanderBurg, that I really, really think is important is that we do not ever move away from the principle that the member is responsible for the expenditures. When you say that a staff member or somebody might have access, I'm sorry. I can never recommend that because of the difficulties that have occurred in other jurisdictions with respect to this matter.

Do you know that even in Manitoba – where's Mr. Mason? He'd be interested in this. They had a major difficulty. The Auditor General just came down with a scathing report about the operation of the Manitoba Legislature and the Legislative Assembly. In Manitoba it seems they gave members individual budgets that members administered. We have central control with the constituency office budgets. There were problems, and we know what happened in Saskatchewan before that. We've done a comparative in terms of what the Auditor General in Manitoba has just recommended for improvements to Manitoba, and we're, like, years ahead in all those areas. So the member is the key to this, to being responsible, not just to put it to a staff member.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. It's not the intention to shift responsibility. It's all about: can we be smarter in our purchasing and more cost-effective?

**The Chair:** Okay. Yeah. Fair game. That's very important.

Anybody else want to add something on that?

Then, Mr. VanderBurg, you had another item dealing with IT services. I presume that's technology services.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, I guess this comes from a little change in our lives. We have a little granddaughter now. I want to spend a

little less time on the road and find out a way that maybe I can use technology to keep me off the road and maybe have a few more interactive meetings both with my constituents and with my staff and some of my committee meetings. The last computer that I was given through the IT services had a little camera inside it, but I can't use that. I'd like to be able to have some interactive meetings through technology and keep me off some of these icy roads and maybe keep me in front of my granddaughter when I could. I'm just wondering if there is money in our budget or if there is any idea that you have, Mr. Speaker, that would allow us to move into that next bit of technology for each member to have that service.

**The Chair:** I'm surprised we don't. Cheryl, do you have a comment to make on this?

**Mrs. Scarlett:** Actually, your timing is perfect. In one of this year's projects there is a continuation of what we would call unified messaging. Right now the members have the ability through Office Communicator internally, our internal messaging system. We train online with constituency staff, and part of what we are rolling out and putting in select constituency offices right now is the installation of, if you will, the webcam, and the appropriate other accessories so that we can teach them how they can use the technology that exists.

Also, we'd like to work with interested members so that the laptop that you have, as you indicated, has the built-in facilities that we can teach all interested parties, the intent being that the member from their laptop with an Internet connection can talk to the constituency office. We can take and expand that as we go. As I say, the timing is perfect in terms of those that are interested and ready, and we, too, would like to go forward and start to help train the const staff and the members.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, none of the budget variances – I see IT services is going to be cut \$50,000 – would stop us from doing this? Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Elniski:** Just a really quick question if I may. With regard to the use of webcams, did I understand you correctly in that you said that MLAs would be allowed to talk to their constituency offices? Is that to suggest that you're not going to be able to use it for meetings other than that?

**Mrs. Scarlett:** The intent of where we're at right now with the technology, the business solution, with the products that we support, is more a one to one. So we're envisioning it as another tool, if you choose to, to talk to your const office staff, to your leg. office staff through the laptop that you have.

**The Chair:** But, Cheryl, what he's talking about is talking with constituents in other parts of Alberta other than the office.

**Mr. Elniski:** Exactly. What if I want to talk to George?

**The Chair:** I assumed we had that technology.

**Mrs. Scarlett:** Member to member, yes, as well. Within our network the intent is that you would be able to use those technologies.

**Mr. Elniski:** And beyond the network?

**Mrs. Scarlett:** Those are additional add-ons that we need to look at as we roll it out in terms of the capabilities.

**Mr. Elniski:** Yeah. Okay.

*11:40*

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, I'm a little perplexed by that because, well, just this morning, as I was leaving for work, my wife was on her laptop at the kitchen table. Unbeknownst to me it was a conference call, so when I, you know, leaned over to kiss her goodbye, there were gales of laughter coming out of the . . .

**The Chair:** Not too much information is really required. Okay?

**Mr. Mason:** There are some academics in Italy that think I'm very romantic, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, the point is that the technology is readily available so that you can have a conference call, a video conference call, with anybody in the world, and I guess I'm just not understanding why we would be rolling out a solution that had, you know, built in and artificial limitations to it.

**The Chair:** I agree. I agree with that.

**Mr. Taylor:** So do I, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay. Just a second. We're going to listen. Okay? Then we're going to respond.

**Mr. Taylor:** I'd agree with Mr. Mason. I think, really, what I was going to say has been said here, so thank you.

**Dr. McNeil:** I just want to raise the caution here. One of the issues that we will have with communication outside the network and from outside the network into the network is security. That's the challenge that we have in terms of moving from allowing communication with people who are on and have access to the network and people outside. That's the issue that is the sticking point in terms of moving to that next step. Now, there are ways to do that, but it's not a simple, simple solution, you know. One to one, from your laptop to somebody in Italy's laptop, just going through the Internet but without the security that surrounds this particular network, there are all sorts of issues and potential for hacking when it comes to letting people into our network without the appropriate safeguards. That's the caution I'd make. That's all.

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, I fully and completely respect and understand that caution. Nonetheless, I think what the committee is asking is that we pursue that avenue. I have a relationship with my constituency assistant. I know her personally. I can picture her in my mind. The technology already exists for me to talk to her. I can phone her or e-mail her. I have her home number. In fact, she has a wireless headset in the office, so while we're talking on the phone, she can be going through the files and stuff. I don't need for her to be sitting in front of a camera to improve our communication. It would be handy with a constituent on certain occasions, assuming that we can deal with the security implications of that. The other thing is that in most of our communities there are teleconference sites, and maybe that's another technology or avenue that we can use. But in terms of improving my constituency office communications, we do okay, I think.

**The Chair:** My conclusion was that I thought we had all this stuff.

Anyway, we've heard what you've said. Quite frankly, the argument about security: there is no security. If anybody believes there's any security in any of this stuff anymore – again, we're into another vogue, where everybody says that you're going to spend billions of dollars to try and get security. There is none. Ask Tiger and others and what have you. You don't walk down the street on a cellphone and expect that somebody is not going to intercept it. I mean, every police thing is being picked up by somebody else in the media, and the reporters are just listening there to all the reports for where the fires are, where the shootings are, and everything else, and they get there ahead of the police and the fire departments. So I think we have to be realistic about this. Yes, for security we're going to try and do everything possible, but nobody is going to get mad when they find out that somebody has overheard what they've said or done because everybody wants it wide open.

**Mr. Mason:** Well, I was going to say: wouldn't it just be a simple matter to go outside of our internal network and just go onto the web and do it?

**The Chair:** You would think. If you've got time to do all this stuff – I'm in my car driving 800 hours a year.

Okay. Mr. Oberle, you wanted to deal with something called committees, or did we deal with it? Go ahead.

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, I would like to discuss this area a little bit more. Mr. Lund raised it earlier, and that is this idea of committee pay. If you look at our total caucus services budgets, which would include that research component, our government caucus gets \$770,364, the Liberal caucus gets \$385,182, the NDs \$192,591, and I think it is just slightly over \$86,000 for each of the independents. Their total adds up to \$164,000 each, I think, according to your budget there. I'm not sure how, exactly, we wound up there. It might have been a fitting model for when we were three party caucuses and no independents, but I think the model should be revisited. If we are going to examine how things are done, I have some questions about how other jurisdictions do them. I wonder if I could ask that your office do some investigation for us.

First of all, how are independent members dealt with and funded in other Legislatures? My understanding is that they don't get official party status, yet we identify one of them in our documents as having a party and one not. They're, in my mind, both independents. Our own Legislature says that you have to have four members to be a recognized party, yet we don't do that with the NDs. Maybe we should have some focus on comparative caucus budgets across the country, but on a per MLA basis we get about \$84,000 and change per member in our government caucus; the Liberals at \$110,000 per member; the NDs at \$163,000 per member, so a factor of two there.

I notice that you indicated earlier that our government caucus lapses significant amounts of money each year – we don't, in fact, use all of that money – that the caucuses have crept to spend the amount allotted to them. We have 40 staff for 45 members. The Liberals have 16 staff for nine members. The NDs have seven staff for two members. So there's a pretty wide discrepancy in there. I know that both the Liberals and the NDs argue that, well, the committee work is still the same. Yes, that's true, but one of our researchers reports to several MLAs, where one of their researchers reports to apparently one or two MLAs. So I think we should have a look at how committee pay is dealt with in other Legislatures and how it's allocated in ours and make some decisions accordingly. I'm not sure we wound up in the right place last time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Taylor.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yeah. Mr. Chairman, just for some clarification on the record here. I suspect that they may do it a different way again in the NDP caucus – I don't know – but in fact our researchers are reporting to a number of different MLAs because each one of those researchers carries usually five different portfolios that they're responsible for researching. So I understand when you look at the numbers on a sort of per head basis, Mr. Oberle, how you come to those conclusions or those assumptions, but it doesn't work that way necessarily. There are other ways of doing it. In fact, our researchers are charged with covering a lot of ground each and, in so doing, reporting to a lot of different MLAs who have portfolio responsibilities for those different areas.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Mason:** Well, Mr. Chairman, this is very interesting. You know, I think Mr. Oberle knows this because we had quite a discussion earlier about the caucus budgets relative to the research that was required for the additional committee work, but the difference fundamentally is that our responsibilities include keeping an eye on the entire government and trying to keep track of what the entire government is doing in addition to what the other caucus responsibilities are such as support for committee meetings and support for individual members. We have, by the way, six and a half staff, and in order to keep track of a government that consists of – how many ministries are there now, 24? Basically, we have two researchers trying to provide support for the committees and, in addition, keep track of 23 or 24 ministries. We have one communications person. We have one outreach person, one administrative assistant.

**11:50**

You know, I think we use our money extremely effectively, maybe too effectively for some people. I don't know. But I want to say that I think we and other opposition members as well perform an essential service. This is a pretty lopsided Legislature as it is, and I would hope that the intent of these comments from the government whip is not to make the situation in our Legislature even more lopsided than it is. I don't think that the public wants to see that, and I don't think it would be good for the province.

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, I just want to point out that I did not say that I think we should have equal funding per MLA. I did not say that I think either of the other parties were underperforming or anything else. But I do think that we should have a look at the situation. To give you an example, right now if you were a member of the government caucus and you resigned the caucus to sit as an independent, you would more than double your office allowance. I don't think committee allowances should be an incentive to sit elsewhere in the House. I think we've probably gone a little beyond where we need to be with committee allowances if that's the situation we've got set up.

For example, I don't know numbers, but it's my understanding that there are special allowances for opposition caucuses in our federal Parliament. It's not equal funding per caucus, and I understand why. By definition the opposition is going to have a smaller caucus than the government, and there are going to be inefficiencies. I don't argue the point. I just want to know: how does it shake out in other Legislatures, and are there any lessons to be learned for us?

**The Chair:** Others to comment?

Well, as you all know, we do a review all the time about keeping



track of what's going on across the country of Canada in all the parliaments and what have you. There'll be adjustments made in some jurisdictions on January 1, 2010. There'll be adjustments made in other jurisdictions on April 1, 2010. We have frozen ours. That will be a stationary thing across the board. But we'll continue the work, and we'll do the comparatives and everything else.

Just before we leave this matter, this is a what-if question – a what-if question – for the Members' Services Committee. Here is the budget that we've provided for you. You've approved the budget. What if the two independents join together to form a party? What if? What do we do then about the budget? Well, you've set the budget. There's no flexibility. So we either go with existing money and reallocation in terms of committee research and everything else and all the rest of that, or we make some other decisions.

Mr. Mason, if there becomes another party of two in the Assembly, which is equivalent to your party in the Assembly, what does the chair do with respect to the allocation in question period if both are equal? We can't have more questions because we basically go in the same direction. So there are going to have to be decisions made.

These what-ifs are what I spend most of Friday mornings thinking about. You don't have to give me an answer.

**Mr. Mason:** Well, I've also considered the what-ifs, Mr. Chairman. I just want to point out that there's a precedent in this that you might be interested in. I forget the year of the election – I guess it was the 1986 election – where a couple of former Social Credit MLAs ran as independents, and the NDP elected two members. So there were four members of the opposition. Mr. Notley made the case – and the Speaker eventually accepted his case – that the NDP should be the Official Opposition because they had run together as a party and that the representative party, which was formed out of the two independents, who were former Social Credit, didn't constitute the Official Opposition. So there is precedent, you know.

**The Chair:** I was just saying: what if? We weren't dealing with anything definitive.

**Mr. Mason:** Yeah. Well, we also imagine these scenarios, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Mr. VanderBurg, did you have a comment?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, what if the independents gained another member and formed a coalition? Would they be the third party?

**The Chair:** Well, that's another one of those what-if questions.

**Mr. Mason:** Please stop.

**The Chair:** Okay. The last item. We have some business here. We've dealt with the business under 4.

I passed you three Members' Services Committee orders. Now, the first one is called Executive Council Salaries Order because – I'll repeat it now again – this Members' Services Committee sets the salaries for everyone, including the Premier and the Executive Council, and they've frozen theirs April 1. What you've got here, the first one, is the Executive Council salaries order.

There shall be no annual adjustment to the salaries outlined in that section for the fiscal years April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010 . . .

We've already done this. We did this last year, but we're changing 1.2 to add:

. . . and April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011.

It effectively freezes the Premier and Executive Council for next fiscal year.

Does somebody want to move this? Mr. Rogers. Mrs. Leskiw. Is there discussion?

**Mr. Mason:** We get control over the Premier's salary?

**The Chair:** We always have, Brian. This committee always has.

**Mr. Mason:** Why didn't you tell me?

**The Chair:** You've known it ever since you've been a member of this. It's not the Premier who sets his salary; it's this committee who sets his salary.

Everybody in favour? Okay. Agreed.

The second one has to do with the members' allowances. This goes, again, because we already did the first part to freeze it April 1 to March 31. In this we amend section 4.2 of that order to add April 1, 2010, to March 31, so then that's frozen to March 31, 2011. A mover please. Mrs. Leskiw and Mr. Oberle. Is there discussion? All those in favour? Okay. Thank you. Agreed unanimously.

The third one has to do with the committee allowances. That basically appoints all the various kinds of committees that exist and what have you. Again, that freezes it to March 31, 2011. Would someone like to move that? Mr. Lund to move. Mr. Weadick to second. Is there discussion on this matter? All those in favour, then, please? Carried. Okay. Very good. Thank you very much.

Those three are done. Everything is frozen.

The next meeting, if there's a requirement for a next meeting. As I understand it, the standing orders say we will return on the second Tuesday of February. If there's a requirement for an additional meeting, I would look at the Wednesday, Thursday of the week previous to February 9. So it would be that Wednesday, Thursday in the first week of February. It would not be in January, so you can clear your schedules for everything else. If it's required, would that be okay?

**Mrs. Leskiw:** When would this be?

**The Chair:** Wednesday or Thursday of the first week in February, the 3rd or 4th of February if it was required.

**Mrs. Leskiw:** Okay. Because it's the Winter Games in our area.

**The Chair:** Well, we'll just have you attend here if we require it and forget about the Winter Games. Do you want to skate on this ice, or do you want to skate on that ice?

**Mrs. Leskiw:** That ice.

**The Chair:** Is there a motion to adjourn? Mr. Weadick. Second. Mr. Oberle. Everybody agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Have a wonderful Christmas.

[The committee adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]





