



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, June 14, 2010
1:30 p.m.

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Third Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Kowalski, Hon. Kenneth R., Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC), Chair
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC), Deputy Chair

Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (WA)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC)
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)*
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)

* substitution for Frank Oberle

Also in Attendance

Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL)
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (Ind)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (WA)
Hinman, Paul, Calgary-Glenmore (WA)
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (Ind)

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>

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 14, 2010

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

The Chair: Welcome, and thank you very much for attending today. We have an agenda in front of us: numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. What we will do is if you approve the minutes, then we'll go immediately to number 4, which is business arising out of the minutes, and we'll just continue where we left off at the last meeting. The motion is on the floor. It's here for us, so we don't have to redo that. A couple of little items under new business, which I'll brief for that. Then we'll set a date for the next meeting, and we'll go forward.

Today I was advised by one member that there would be a substitute for him. Mr. Oberle cannot be with us today. Mr. Quest is substituting for Mr. Oberle. I received no other official notifications of substitutes, but we will have guests here today as well. Ms Blakeman advised me that she would be attending. Mr. Boutilier also advised me that he would be attending, and we have Mr. Taylor with us as well today.

Approval of the agenda, if we could deal with that matter first, and then we'll deal with – yes, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chair, if the agenda could just be amended – sorry. You're on approval of agenda?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Taylor: Sorry. I'll come back in a second.

The Chair: Okay. Can we have, though, approval of the agenda?

Mrs. Leskiw: I'll so move.

The Chair: Mrs. Leskiw – okay; good enough – and Mr. Campbell. Everybody agree?

So, then, business arising out of the minutes. First of all, there is an error in the minutes dealing with those who attended the last meeting. On the official minutes that will come down, Allison will make that correction, but, Allison, do you want to just advise what that correction will be?

Ms Quast: In the minutes that you have, Mr. Anderson is not included in the list of members; Mr. VanderBurg is. Mr. VanderBurg was not here at that meeting, and of course Mr. Anderson was and is a member of the committee.

The Chair: So that will be taken care of.
Yes, sir, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Can I have the minutes changed or amended as well to reflect that I was in attendance at the last meeting?

The Chair: You were here.

Mr. Taylor: I was here, watching with interest.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

The Chair: Others? Anything else arising out of the approval of the minutes? Can I have a motion for approval, then, please?

Mrs. Leskiw: So moved.

The Chair: Mrs. Leskiw again. Okay. Thank you. Everybody agree to that?

When we were here last, we had a situation whereby, and the *Hansard* will show, a matter was introduced by Mr. Hinman on page 70, and then Mr. Anderson participated, as did Mr. Rogers. Then on page 74 you will see in the *Hansard* of that meeting a motion that was presented by Mr. Anderson. That motion is:

Be it resolved that committee members of the Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the leader's (caucus) allowance per annum funding in the amount of \$233,249 to the Wildrose Alliance caucus.

That motion remains before us.

Following the motion that was put forward by Mr. Anderson, Mr. Hehr made comments, Mr. Mason made comments, Mr. Allred made comments, Mr. Boutilier made comments. On the speaking list that I had when we adjourned, I had Mr. Rogers, to be followed by Mr. Anderson. I would just like to pick up where we left off. We have a motion before us. Mr. Rogers is not here, so I'll recognize Mr. Anderson, and then, Mr. Hinman, you wanted to participate again, too?

Mr. Hinman: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay.
Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I made several comments last time, so I won't repeat them. I just wanted to again address a couple of issues that came up at the last meeting real briefly. I guess the most important reasoning behind our request today is just, again, the purpose for which this leader's allowance or caucus allowance is intended, and that is to make sure that all opposition parties in the Legislature are given the funding that they need to do their job, which is to hold the government to account, of course, as any responsible opposition would do.

In order to do that, a caucus needs adequate research and communications funding in order to not only research what the government is doing and the effects of that legislation that they're bringing forth on Albertans but also to communicate that message. Given the resources that the government has at its disposal, which it should – it is a government – it's just very important that opposition parties at the very least have the funding necessary to communicate their message, to research the different bills and the different things that the government is doing, and to be able to come up with different policy options and solutions for Albertans. That's our job.

It was talked about a little bit that, you know, we're in a deficit position, so why are we asking for additional caucus funding equal to that of the NDP caucus? I guess there are some things in a democracy that you just have to pay for. One is elections, obviously. Just because there's a deficit we don't postpone elections. We don't shut down the government because we're running a deficit. We have to make sure that we prioritize. Although to maybe some individuals this doesn't seem like a lot of money or a very important thing, I assure you that there are clearly four parties in Alberta, and the Wildrose is one of those parties with a high degree of support in this province. We need to be able on those people's behalf and all Albertans' behalf to have the funding necessary to do our job. Right now we're doing the best with what we have, but we hope that we can be treated fairly in that regard.

The last point is just that of the precedents in this Legislature. We have a precedent, a very clear precedent, that has been to this point

upheld by this committee that we do give the funding that we're talking about to opposition parties. The most important precedent, I would say, or most noteworthy precedent, of course, is that of when Mr. Mitchell stepped down as Liberal leader and Mr. Sapers took over in the interim before Ms Betkowski became Liberal leader, and then also when she was Liberal leader without a seat for a time. That caucus funding still flowed to the Liberal caucus, as it should have. There were also two precedents with the NDP in the past where that has also been the case.

This would truly be an unprecedented decision if the Wildrose caucus was not given the funding just because their leader was not an elected member of the Legislature. We have an acting leader for all matters pertaining to the Legislative Assembly; that's Mr. Paul Hinman. We've been very clear about that. I think that that needs to be respected. His legislative duties are the same as the other opposition leaders in the Legislature today. I think it would be a very poor precedent to set.

I mean, we talk about making sure we're separating party business from legislative business. I'm assuming those leaders' allowances are not to be used for anything that would be partisan or party related. If that's the case, if that money is only to be used for legislative purposes, then it would make sense that Mr. Hinman as our acting legislative leader for this caucus should be given that same amount of leader's funding to perform his duties as the acting leader in the House for the Wildrose Alliance.

One last question came up last time. It's a good question, and I respect the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for raising it. It was concerning the budget: how in this deficit year can we want more funding for this and why would we want to approve that given the state of our province's balance sheet? The fact is that we did not have an opportunity before Budget 2010 was passed to bring this up for various reasons. I'm not going to go into those reasons. The fact is that we didn't have that opportunity even though it was requested prior to the budget. I don't think there was anything untoward about it or anything like that; it's just that we never had the opportunity to bring that up in this committee. So I don't think it's right to say that, you know, we should have brought it up before the budget was passed.

Not only that but, obviously, with the example of Mr. Taylor becoming an independent, not only did the \$67,000 for his leg. assistant or leg. staff come over with him to his independent office, so too did \$96,000 of additional research funding. The Liberal caucus did not lose any of their funding . . .

1:40

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, we did.

Mr. Anderson: The caucus funding?

Ms Blakeman: That day.

Mr. Anderson: You lost the – not the \$67,000.

Ms Blakeman: Yep.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, you lost the \$67,000. That's what I said.

The Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry.

They lost the \$67,000, as I said, but they did not lose the research portion of their funding.

Ms Blakeman: Based on size.

Mr. Anderson: Exactly. Because it's not based on size, as the member says.

That \$96,000 was additional money to the LAO budget that wasn't being paid for before, and that's for one person. We're talking about a caucus of three here, and we're talking about a sum of \$233,000. We also saw that with Mr. Boutilier in the last go-round, too, when he switched to become an independent. I don't think there is any conflict with the fact that, you know, we already have a budget in place and we're asking to find some money in the current budget to fill this obligation.

I think that it's a very reasonable request. With that, I will cede the floor.

The Chair: I recognized Mr. Hinman. Then I will recognize Mr. Rogers and Mr. VanderBurg.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks, everyone, for making the effort to be here today for this committee meeting. I think it's very important for the future of Albertans and the decision that we make here today. I want to talk a little bit more to the committee about why are we here and why are we addressing the funding for the Wildrose Alliance caucus.

Many Albertans in my last five years in working with Albertans and elected representatives are somewhat jaded about the democratic process and feel that, you know: "Why should I get engaged? What difference does it make?" When each of us go to the door, we give them reasons. We tell them why it's important. But too often we give those reasons, and then they say: "Well, once you get in there, everything changes." So I think the first and most important question that the committee members should reflect on is: what image, what thoughts, what perception are we putting out there to Albertans with the decision that we make today?

Everybody understands the importance of funding for research, for development, and the work that goes on within our caucuses and realizes that we couldn't do without it. It is very valuable. But, as I mentioned, many Albertans are jaded. They wonder what's going on, why this happens. It doesn't make sense to them. And when things don't make sense, they say: why bother participating?

There's no question that the Wildrose Alliance has three members in the House. They're recognized there. They're allowed to ask questions. They're allowed to give members' statements and all those other things that go along with our democratic process. They are penalized, though, when it comes to research funding compared to other caucuses that are represented here in the Legislature.

Once again, when that appearance goes out there, it's upsetting to many Albertans. So I think the first question we need to look at and be mindful of is: what are Albertans going to think, and are we serving their best interests? In serving the best interests of Albertans, we all are here. We want a better Alberta. We want to make sure that we're doing the best we can, and many ideas are brought forward in the Legislature. There's a lot of research that's done on how we are going to solve our problems, how we are going to solve municipal funding, how we are going to balance our budget, what the priorities are, how we are going to solve our health care, our education dilemmas.

It's important that all of those caucuses have the research to go out and to bring forward those ideas. If one area is not given that what I want to call equitable funding or level playing field, it's upsetting to those people that are in support of those ideas, and they say: well, why is there funding going to this group but not ours? That's a problem that I deal with constantly, with people asking: "Why is this

situation?" And I say: "Well, we need to wait until we go through Members' Services and have the opportunity to see what that decision is." I think we have a great opportunity to show Albertans that we're very much about democracy, that we want fair and equitable funding, and ensure that they have it.

I just want to go back a little bit historically as well because many on the committee might argue, saying: well, they didn't exist in the last election; there was nobody elected and represented. But there were 64,000 Albertans that voted for the Wildrose Alliance in March 2008. They knew and understood our values and our principles, and there was strong support there. So it's not like this just came on the radar screen, hasn't existed. We've been around. Albertans know, they're aware, and they have voted in fairly large numbers in order for us to be here. Again, we are now sitting with three members, which is quite an accomplishment. The funding, we feel, needs to be there in order to really bring forward those ideas, that we can have a democratic discussion, that opposing views can be brought forward, that we can hopefully come and develop a better Alberta.

It's all about the future of Alberta. Many people always say: well, if you know human nature, human nature is always to protect our own turf, what's best for ourselves. We can get a very myopic look and be very selfish in those ideas. A classic example is in traffic. If we're selfish and there's a merge lane and we don't let people in, we get all clogged up, and we don't flow freely. But if, in fact, we realize that our best interest is actually to yield and let someone else come in and merge back and forth, we do better. It's the same with the democratic process, I believe. If we actually yield to bring forward a full discussion and not say, "Well, we're going to put you off to the side; we've got the right-of-way; we've got the majority; we don't need to listen to you," that's upsetting to those people that are on the side who think that they should be going down the political highway along with everyone else.

I really feel, like I say, that often, if we just look really selfishly, we can say, "I have the right-of-way," and perhaps you do. But in actual if you want to say selflessness, we can say: "Well, we're going to do better if we actually are equitable. If we see and give respect to all people on the political highways, we'll do better." I think that the view we need to go forward as this committee is to realize that there is more than one vehicle, one democratic party, in this process. Let's make sure that this is a level playing field. Let's engage with Albertans and allow them to do that.

With any corporation that's trying to move forward, the research and development money is critical. When that's cut back, you can see the slow death of the process. So I would really strongly encourage all members of this committee to vote in favour of this motion so that we can move forward, so Albertans can re-engage and increase their, I guess, hope in democracy a little bit more and say: "Well, you know, they made the right decision. We're going forward. Isn't this a great day for Alberta, that we can ensure that we have a level playing field so that everybody can participate?"

I'll leave it with that, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Rogers, followed by Mr. VanderBurg.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've listened keenly to the hon. members for Calgary-Glenmore and Airdrie-Chestermere, and I guess I get a little confused. I mean, we had quite a thorough discussion at the last meeting, and of course we're continuing this now, but these two members seem to go back and forth between the question that's before us, which asks for a leadership allowance, and discussing research and caucus funding.

I've done some checking since the last meeting, Mr. Chairman,

and if I'm not mistaken, the Wildrose Alliance, of course with the three members, currently enjoys shy of \$395,000 worth of caucus and research support. The question before us today is for some additional \$232,000, give or take, for the leadership allowance. If I remember correctly, the Legislative Assembly Act – I don't believe that we in this room or anyone else in Alberta has the option of deciding whether we follow this or not. I mean, as a Members' Services Committee we have some latitude here in terms of what we can recommend to the Legislature, but underneath it all is the Legislative Assembly Act, which speaks to an elected leader of a party with four members and goes on, I think, to some 5 per cent of the vote in the previous election, et cetera.

1:50

The question before us today speaks of an amount that's reflective of a leader's allowance. We do not have a leader of this particular party in the Legislative Assembly, and as such, following the act, I am still not of the opinion that we should be supporting the motion as it's put before us. I would encourage the members, particularly from the Wildrose Alliance, to be clear when they speak of this and not lump the leader's allowance and the caucus research support together because they're two different items. When they speak in this committee and speak to Albertans, they would give the impression that they have no support to do their work. I say that they have \$395,000. In my book that's a very substantial sum, and I really would like us to keep the two separate. Through you, Mr. Chairman, I would respectfully ask for a clarification from the hon. members.

We have a letter before us. I believe this is the second letter, this letter dated May 28 signed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. A rather long title: "Acting Leader for the Wildrose Alliance Caucus in all matters pertaining to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta." I don't get it, Mr. Chairman. If I'm not mistaken, I believe that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is the House leader. So what is an acting leader for all matters pertaining to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta? I don't get it.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have a speakers list, and Mr. Hinman is on this speakers list. We'll go now to Mr. VanderBurg, then to Mr. Mason, then Mr. Hinman.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chairman, I'd ask for some clarification from you. Mr. Anderson made his comments about support and saw quickly that Ms Blakeman disagreed on a point and then brought up the point that there are not proper resources. Mr. Hinman's comments made it sound like there wasn't equitable funding. Can you explain to me, Mr. Chairman – I imagine that you went over it at the last meeting, but I was absent – what is the total funding that each party gets? I understand it's \$67,000 per member, but I'm not sure on the other component. Do you have that in front of you?

The Chair: I guess. I carry that with me all the time.

Mr. VanderBurg: Could you give me some clarification on that? Again, it's confusing for Albertans out there listening. If I was listening and not knowing that background, I would think that support funds aren't going to the Wildrose Alliance.

Also, Mr. Chairman, while you're looking for that, Mr. Hinman did say that people are constantly coming up to him and asking about funding. I tell you, he must represent a lot of different people than I do because there are a lot of issues on people's minds, but I've never heard anybody come to me and ask me: what is the caucus funding, per member funding? My gosh, that's a new one.

The Chair: In response to you, Mr. VanderBurg, I can either provide that information to the committee now or I can put myself fourth down the list after Mr. Mason, Mr. Hinman, and Mr. Campbell. What would be appropriate, go now or go later?

Hon. Members: Go now.

The Chair: On April 14, 2010, I sent letters to a number of individuals. The first letter went to the chief government whip, Mr. Campbell. Under the Members' Services budget there was to be paid an amount per member of the government caucus. In the government caucus as a result of their per-member item, per member times the number of members they have, they received \$2,898,501. Then members will recall that a couple of years ago we concluded a committee research budget component, and the government caucus this year receives \$770,364. If you total the two, that comes to \$3,668,865.

The same day a memo went to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Based on their per-member allocation – that's \$67,407 times the number of members they had – they received \$541,287 this year. They receive a leader's office allowance of \$466,498. They receive \$77,144 for a Calgary office stipend. For their committee research component, which was to be 50 per cent of the government research component – that's what the Official Opposition will receive – they will receive this year \$385,182 dollars. That totals \$1,470,111.

The same day a memo went to the leader of the ND opposition. They have two members, so that \$67,407 amounted to \$134,814. They receive a leader's office allowance, half of what is provided to the Official Opposition. It's \$233,249. They receive a committee research component, which would be 50 per cent of the Official Opposition's, which is \$192,591. That \$192,591 is 25 per cent of what's allocated to the government research office. So the total for the ND opposition is \$560,654.

That same day a memo went to Mr. Paul Hinman, deputy leader, Wildrose Alliance opposition. Per member: three at \$67,407 amounts to \$202,221. They receive for the committee research component \$192,591 for a total of \$394,812.

The independent Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo received a memo as well. He received \$67,407 for his per-member allocation, and for committee research he received \$96,296 for a total budget in this current fiscal year of \$163,703. That \$96,296 for research was half of what was provided to the other opposition party.

On April 13 another memo went in. It went to the independent Member for Calgary-Currie. It was prorated because of that time frame to March 12. He received \$65,376 plus a committee research component of \$93,394 for a total of \$158,770 this fiscal year.

Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, it's been interesting listening to the comments that have been made by both the speakers for the Wildrose Alliance caucus and the Progressive Conservative caucus. Speakers for the PC caucus have singled out points that were made that may not be entirely correct. But, you know, I want to say that this is not about whether or not this money was for research or for communications or for other legitimate purposes of a caucus. It's not about whether it's a top-of-mind issue for voters or not. This is an issue about whether or not we are making decisions in this committee based on principle that is applied consistently from term to term – in other words, whether or not we respect the precedents that have been set – or, alternatively, whether it's based on political gamesmanship designed to secure and maintain partisan political advantage.

I think that we can take a close look at some of the arguments that are made if we want to have a look at the whole question of the leader's allowance and whether or not you need an elected leader in order to qualify because that's the primary argument that's being put forward by the PC caucus. I think that Mr. Hinman's letter is very illuminating in this regard. He cited a number of precedents in which caucuses did not have a leader sitting as a member of the caucus yet received this portion of the budget for their caucus.

In fact, nobody has been able to point to a single instance in which the leader's allowance, or whatever you want to call it, has been denied simply because there has not been a sitting leader until this time, until this semantic game where the fact that it's called a leader's allowance is used to exclude a legitimate caucus from receiving this portion of their budget. It clearly doesn't meet the test of the precedent of this Assembly, and it must therefore be political gamesmanship, designed to secure a political advantage.

2:00

I want to also talk about some other political games that are going on. At about the time that the two members crossed the floor from the Progressive Conservative caucus to the Wildrose Alliance caucus, there was a change in the nomenclature accorded to our caucus and also the Wildrose Alliance by you, Mr. Speaker, and all of a sudden we became known as independents. Now, this was not consistent either with the precedent of this House. There was no point of order raised by any member in connection to that change in our status. In fact, following the last election, when we were elected with two members, we were accorded the privilege of being a caucus and being referred to as a caucus. We were included, for example, at things organized in the Legislative Assembly for Remembrance Day or for recognition of different religious groups or linguistic groups and so on. Suddenly, we were no longer allocated a speaking role.

Now, there was no change in our status. We still had the same two people elected in this Assembly that we had right after the election, but suddenly something changed that changed our status as a caucus, at least in some people's minds. I want to just be very clear about this, that there has been no official change that I'm aware of in terms of our caucus. There was certainly nothing to trigger a change in the status of our caucus. No point of order was raised, and there was certainly no change in our numbers. We still had the same two MLAs that we had when we were an opposition caucus and accorded all of the privileges that we're entitled to. So I think that there are a lot of political games being played here.

You know, democracy is a funny thing. If it's really going to work, you have to be prepared to accord those rights and privileges to people even if you don't agree with them, even if they might threaten your position. You have to be prepared to be balanced and fair. That's why we depend in our system so much and so heavily on precedent. It's to ensure that principles are applied consistently over time and regardless of whether or not somebody is the right political party or the left political party. I mean correct. That's why precedent is so important in our legislative system, so that you can't sort of say: well, we don't like you, so we're not going to give you something that we gave this other guy over here or back five years ago. Precedent exists in order to make sure that these things are applied consistently and fairly, and it's the only way that I can think of to make sure that that happens. When our precedent is not properly defended as it should be by those who should be defending it and gives way to partisan political gamesmanship, then our parliamentary system is weakened and our democracy is weakened. I think that it's a real shame that that is going on.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hinman, followed by Mr. Campbell, followed by Mr. Anderson, followed by Mrs. Forsyth.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Brian, for being so eloquent in putting that out. I thought that the letter that we sent out was very clear that we're talking about caucus funding. The letter goes back and talks about the debate, whether it's called caucus funding, leader's office allowance, what it is. There are many other areas that we could go after: the Calgary office that the Liberals have received, an office in the Legislature for the New Democrats when the House is sitting. We're not concerned with those.

The stipend of the leader: again, some people seem to think that I'm after the stipend for the leader's allowance. That has never been asked for. I thought this stuff was clear, but it seems like the members of the Progressive Conservative Party here want to put on a magic show and smoke and mirrors and use all these fancy words and descriptions and say, you know: oh, look; it's been beheaded. But Albertans are watching. That's why I used the term "jaded" when I first spoke about it. Albertans are jaded. If the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne doesn't know that, well, the emperor doesn't know that he doesn't have new clothes on. It's not our problem that you go out and you aren't told about these things. It's very clear to Albertans. You can stay inside your little kingdom and say that everything's fine, and that is fine. You're politically fine to do that. We're okay with that.

What we're talking about is equitable funding, how the caucuses are funded. Like I say, if you go back and read the original letter that was sent to you, it was debated many times whether it was caucus funding or the leader's office funding. It's not the fancy words that we're after. Again, as Mr. Mason said, it's about the principle of it and what people see. When we watch a game being played and the refs aren't very fair, the people get very upset. We're the referees today in this committee. We're going to vote on this, and Albertans are going to watch.

To the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, that's what it is. Albertans are watching, and when they see the funding that's given to the Progressive Conservative Party, the Liberals, and the NDs and what's given to the Wildrose Alliance, they look at that and say: why is the ref penalizing that caucus? That's what it is. It's a penalty, saying that the leader isn't in here, when that isn't the purpose of that funding. It isn't the question, as Mr. Mason brought forward. The question is: is each caucus able to represent those Albertans who voted for them in the best way possible? And they're not in the current situation, and that's why we've brought this motion forward, to bring that to equitable funding.

Mr. Mason brought up many other important issues, yet we feel that Albertans will just judge this government for what it does: "Why did they lose their status, and why are they no longer recognized as a caucus? Nothing has changed." The argument that, you know, we don't have the money – this government continues to spend money on other issues. Democracy isn't cheap. It isn't free. It has a cost. Albertans realize that. It is just one of those things. When the member switched over and became an independent, we didn't use that argument to say that we won't fund them because we have a budget that we've allotted in there. No. It was clear enough that you felt that there was no political gamesmanship that could be carried on. Yes, there could have been, but there wasn't for these independent members.

The importance of this is for funding the ideas, the values, and the principles of Albertans that have voted for and support the Wildrose Alliance caucus and our work in there. This idea about an elected leader: like I say, go back and look up the precedents. That's been

a political manoeuvre to be able to play these types of games, but it isn't the intent or the purpose of the funding of political parties that have been elected to the Legislative Assembly. So I would ask the members to take off their sunshades and look with the full light and realize that we need to have equitable funding. It's important.

I didn't want to bore them by going back through my whole letter and reviewing that, but the comments that were brought up make me worried that maybe the PC members haven't read it and aren't aware of the precedents and the full debate that we're bringing forward. I guess I'll gauge that by the questions and the debate that they bring forward further, whether we need to go back and read all of those things into *Hansard* again. It is very clear. It's about equitable funding. We have three members. We need to have that funding in order to be the best we can be for Albertans.

I will say again, even if you want to be selfish, that we'll have the best ideas for you to be able to take. We'll do the research; we'll make the presentations. If there is anything that's going to save you, it will be the ideas that Albertans are sharing with us, that you now want to run out and say: oh, we'll go talk to Albertans. Again, you go out there in a partisan way, as we all do, so we'll wonder about that.

This is about doing what's right for Albertans, saying: "Look, they voted for those people. These people are in that caucus. This is the precedent that has been set. We understand the importance of funding opposition parties as well as the government party." Let's do the right thing, and let's improve the democratic health here in the province so that Albertans can say that we're doing the right thing and that parties are being recognized, and we'll go back to where we were a few years ago.

Thank you.

2:10

The Chair: Mr. Campbell, followed by Mr. Anderson and then Mrs. Forsyth.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you. Mr. Chair, if I could, through you I'd like to table some documents.

The Chair: I have no idea how many documents you have, Mr. Campbell. They'll go to the members first.

Mr. Campbell: Yeah. I think I have enough for each of the members.

The Chair: Do all members have one?

Mr. Campbell: There might be some guests that got copies that probably shouldn't have.

The Chair: Go ahead. Proceed, Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Chair. In doing some research, this is the earliest documentation that I could find that dealt with committees talking about allowances and salaries. As you can see, this document is from September of 1979. It was a committee that was chaired by the hon. Justice Tevie H. Miller, which is quite interesting reading. Actually, what's really interesting is that it talks about history and talks about the amount of money that MLAs made back in 1978, but I won't dwell on that point. I think what's important: this is the first document I could find that actually talked about the leader's allowance.

If you turn to page 20, which is the last page of the document – it actually starts on page 19 – the committee talks about several of the provinces recognizing "the special responsibilities and extra duties

that devolve upon a leader of a recognized political party in opposition and provide an extra allowance to such persons.” At that time in Alberta the government only recognized the Leader of the Official Opposition, and he received a pay that was equivalent to that of a minister with portfolio.

What the committee recognized was that there should be some limits to this principle and that there is a substantial difference between the responsibilities of the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leaders of the third and fourth parties. Nevertheless, they felt that the principles should be recognized in Alberta. I've underlined their comments, which say:

We would recommend that provision be made for an allowance to be paid to the leader of a recognized party, other than the Leader of the Official Opposition . . .

The amount at that time was \$5,000 per annum, which shows that we've come a long ways in inflation.

. . . on the conditions that the Leader holds an elected seat in the Legislature, his party holds a minimum of four seats in the Legislature and received 5% of the total popular vote in the preceding election.

What is also important and what I didn't underline is the sentence after that, which says:

We realize that no other party leader will qualify for such an allowance in the present Legislature but again we feel there is a principle to be recognized and have set the minimum conditions so as to ensure that other parties are representative of a significant portion of the people in this Province before their leader qualifies for this allowance.

When we talk about precedents, Mr. Chair, and what the leader from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talked about, I think that we have followed this. I can't see any precedent anywhere else from 1979 to the present where we've deviated from this. I think it's important that we recognize the leader from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He is the leader of his party, and we recognize that, so he is entitled to a leader's allowance. We recognize the Liberal Party as the Official Opposition and pay the funding accordingly. I don't think we've deviated from what was set out in 1979. I feel that what we've done has been accurate to this point and that we're continuing the process now.

The only thing that does concern me is that if we are seen as playing political gamesmanship – you know, in my years on the job I used to do in the past, I always found the best thing to do is to follow the rules. If the rules state something, then, you know, if you deviate from them, you get in trouble; if you follow the rules, you don't get into trouble. I would leave that on the table for further discussion, but I am prepared, myself, to carry on as we have and that we continue to pay the leader's allowance to the two parties as we are doing. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Chair, the other party's leader is not sitting in the House, has not been elected by the people of Alberta, which I think is a very important proposition, that the leader is elected and serving the people that have put them there. I think we just move on with the business as we have in the past.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I appreciate the member looking this up, but what this refers to, Member, has nothing to do with the caucus allowance that we're talking about today. It's completely irrelevant. The reason it's irrelevant is because it talks about the leader's allowance, that under the Legislative Assembly Act for each leader of the opposition, if you're an official, recognized party – in other words, four seats in the Legislature, 5 per cent of the vote – then you get the stipend. You get a salary stipend, personal pay. That is not what we're talking about today. Glad you looked this up. Totally irrelevant.

The second point. It goes back to the point of the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. Again, you were referring in your comments to the stipend, to the leader's allowance, the actual paycheque, the one that goes into their personal bank account. That's a totally separate issue and not something that we're talking about.

Going back to the points that were brought up by the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne – and it took me a while to get through the numbers here as well – there are three components of funding that parties get. The first, as the Speaker said, is a per-member amount of \$67,000. That follows members. In other words, to take the example of Mr. Taylor, when he crossed the floor, that \$67,000 went from the Liberal caucus to Mr. Taylor's independent office. No doubt about that. There's no dispute about that.

The second portion of pay is a committee research funding amount. There's \$385,000 roughly, give or take, that goes to the Liberals as the Official Opposition. Then half of that amount goes to the NDP and the Wildrose, so that's about \$192,000. That's not in dispute.

The amount in dispute is the third amount that is given to parties, and that is the caucus, or leader's, allowance for the leader's office. It's not the money that goes to the leader himself on a personal paycheque but the actual leader's office allowance, which I'm assuming is used for communications material, for research, for staff, for all those different responsibilities that the acting leader of a party in the Legislature has: to go around to different functions that they have to go to on behalf of the caucus, to put research, communications pieces out. I mean, there are all kinds of different uses for that. It's not like this is personal money. That's the difference here. The NDP gets that in the amount of \$233,000, and the Liberals get – I don't know exactly what it is. Is it double that? Is that right? Yes, double that.

Ms Blakeman: It's based on the average of the previous year's cost of a ministerial office.

Mr. Anderson: So it's essentially double the \$233,000 that the NDP gets, and that's the amount that the Wildrose does not get because their leader is not elected.

Now, if we want to talk about precedent, that's absolutely right. What the Member for West Yellowhead brought forward here with the report of this committee from 1979 is clearly about the salary stipend. It's called allowances and salaries. What they're talking about there, that \$5,000 per annum, is a salary. It's the amount that is given to the individual leader of a party if they're elected, if they have 5 per cent of the vote. Again, this is a totally separate issue. We need to make sure that that's clear.

If you look at the precedents around this issue that we're talking about today, not the salary but the caucus funding piece, the leader's office allowance as it is called, the precedents are unequivocal and unanimous. They are very clear in every case, every single case. If you go to Mr. Mitchell, as we've cited, with Mr. Sapers in the interim, the caucus office allowance remained with the Liberal Party at that time. Even though they didn't have an elected leader in the Legislature, the funding didn't dry up. It still went there. Okay? The same when Mr. Notley tragically lost his life. The same thing.

2:20

We have got to make sure that if we're going to talk about precedents and if we're going to use precedents, we use applicable precedents. The precedent is clear in this case. There is only one reason why we would be denied this funding. There's only one reason, and that's partisanship. That's all it is. The reason it wasn't

taken away from the other parties? I don't know; I wasn't there at the time. But I'll tell you one thing: there's only one reason why it's being denied to the Wildrose at this time if that is, indeed, the decision of the government members, and that is because the Wildrose is a threat to them. They know it, and Albertans sure know it.

I don't understand it, you know, because I know a lot of the folks over there in the PC caucus. I just don't understand it. I understand we all have different views of democracy and democratic fairness and the power of individual representatives and representing their constituents first and foremost and all that stuff. But this is clear, guys. This is clear stuff. There is no doubt that the right thing to do, the thing that there's clear precedent for, is to allow this leader's office funding to flow to the Wildrose Alliance. It's the only fair thing to do.

I'll tell you this. I'll put this on the record right now. If there is a different governing party after the next election, whether we're in government or the Liberals or somebody else is in government, we will respect this rule and the precedent that we're talking about today, and we will make sure that all opposition parties and will support that all opposition parties are treated completely fairly. I don't care what the situation is. I think that's what Albertans deserve. We have 40 per cent turnout – 40 per cent turnout. People look at this Legislature sometimes, and they just shake their heads. And they rightfully should. We can do better, guys. You know, why can we not just for once put aside the partisan politics here on something that is so clear and just do the right thing? Mr. Chair, I just hope that we'll follow the precedents.

One last question was from the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon: what is the acting leader for the Wildrose Alliance caucus in all matters pertaining to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta? You can look yourself in the mirror, because that's exactly what we've had to resort to here, the wordsmithing that we've had to resort to. It's one thing after another: "Oh, he's not the acting leader. He's kind of the leader. He's the deputy leader, but he's not really the leader." Like, who determines who's the elected leader of a party? Is that in the act somewhere? No, it's not. This is just wordsmithing. What are we funding? We're funding partisan activities now? We're funding the leader based on if a party selects them or not? That would mean that any party would have to elect an MLA to be its party leader. You know, if a leader was to step down and there was a leadership vote held for that party, it would have to be an MLA that they selected or they'd lose all the funding. I mean, that's absurd. That's not democratic.

The work we do here is separate. It is separate from party business, as the Speaker and the Legislative Assembly Office, rightfully so, have gone over and over and over again. The two are separate. Paul Hinman, by unanimous consent of his elected caucus, is the acting leader for the Wildrose Alliance. If you want to wordsmith, there's your wordsmith. If that's what you want, if you want to play a semantics game, there you go. There's your semantics. But if you want to just do the fair thing and the thing that there's precedent for, the democratic thing, the right thing, well, the answer is simple. Hopefully, you'll do the right thing.

That's it, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Mrs. Forsyth, followed by Mr. Mason, then Mr. Campbell, then Mr. Boutilier. Ms Blakeman, too.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I actually wasn't going to speak. I was actually just going to come as an observer and listen to the debate that was going on.

Mr. Chair, I probably am one of the longest sitting members in

this committee room other than you, who has got several more years than me. I always like to refer to the fact that I've been around, and sometimes that can age you. I can tell you that I was in this Legislature when some of this debate came forward in regard to the Howard Sapers incident, the NDP funding. I can honestly never remember seeing so much debate as what's going on today. I can remember – my memory hasn't failed me at this time in my life, with my age – talking about this in caucus, discussing this in caucus and determining, when we discussed this in caucus, what was fair to the role of the opposition, as much as at times as government members we didn't like the opposition because of the fact that they were there to question us on a daily basis in regard to the performance of the government.

I just want to talk about where I was, where I am today, and where we're going. As a government member I am well aware of the government stipend that was given of \$67,000 to each member. Mr. Chair, I cannot honestly remember, going back to '93, till I became a cabinet minister in 2001, lost my cabinet minister position in 2006, until I left the party in 2010, ever having one leg. assistant to take care of me. We had a shared leg. assistant. The caucus research of \$97,000, I don't ever remember seeing that coming separately to Heather Forsyth, MLA; that's her money. We talk about all of the money that the PCs get, which is \$3.686 million, I think. That's for every member of the Legislature.

Let's just talk for a minute about the money that the cabinet minister gets and the staffing a cabinet minister gets. You know, there is this great big amount of money that the PC government gets along with a pile of researchers and some staff and a whole bunch of other things that they get at their hands right now. Today, Mr. Speaker, I sit in a caucus of three with two researchers. We have two leg. assistants. We put in 14 hours a day every day, probably six days a week and sometimes seven, to try to keep the government accountable. That doesn't preclude the time we spend meeting with Albertans, talking to Albertans.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that democracy is on the top of people's minds. I happened to have a day off on Saturday to enjoy a round of golf and did not know the two gentlemen that were beside us. He said to me on the second hole: "I know how you're doing. How are you going to get the money? Are you going to get the money that you guys should be getting?" I didn't even ask him his political affiliation. I really didn't want to know because of the fact that sometimes you want to have some quality time or some nice time away from the political scene.

As a member that served on a Members' Services Committee in '97, I thought we might have an interesting debate. It doesn't surprise me because we all know, as a former member of Members' Services, that we have a little precommittee meeting. I'm not sure what time yours was today or if it occurred this week at all. It's interesting to find out that all of a sudden we get a document, 1979. I wonder how many researchers it took to find that. Mr. Chair, it's about fairness. It's about doing what's right.

We've got something in this province I've never seen before, and I've been a member of a political party and involved in politics since 1976. I've never seen such excitement that has been shown by Albertans, no matter what the political stripe. We've finally started to get Albertans excited about politics. We've talked about even paying people to vote. Now we've got Albertans interested. Take away their political stripes, they're becoming interested in what's happening in this province. I think that's important.

I think it's important to treat all caucus members, all political parties, fairly. I remember at length the debate with the NDP and the funding in regard to giving them a stipend that they could survive

on. You know, some members in my particular caucus didn't agree with that, but I think we treated them fairly.

Mr. Speaker, when you have in *Hansard* that it's like containing puppies in a basket, I don't think it's puppies. I genuinely think it's enthusiasm in regard to what's happening in this province.

I really, really urge the committee members – and I'm not part and parcel of it – that a precedent has been set. It's been clearly articulated in the letter that Mr. Hinman brought forward. I think it's actually, Mr. Chair, probably one of the best letters I have seen come to a committee, whether I was a member of that particular committee or not, all done by probably two researchers, that spent a lot of time researching what's happened. Then one of the government members follows something up in 1979 in regard to salary.

2:30

Mr. Chair, I urge the members that are sitting around this table that are voting members of this committee to support what the Wildrose is presenting. I also at this time want to thank my colleague Mr. Mason for speaking so eloquently. There are times we agree, obviously there are times we don't agree, but no one can take away what he has said.

We are talking about a precedent, a well-established, well-researched precedent, if I can say so myself. One of our members mentioned the fact that we follow the rules. Well, if we're following rules, then, you know, if he wants to refer to a document in 1979, it's obvious that the Conservative government hasn't been following rules from 1979 till now, so that's questionable. So then what do we do? We go back to 1979 and we'll say to the NDP caucus and we'll say to the Liberal caucus and we'll say to both of our independent members: we weren't following the rules, so you have to give us our money back, okay?

Again, I urge members of this committee to support the motion that's on the floor. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Campbell, followed by Mr. Boutilier, followed by Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Hinman.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to refer to the research that's been produced by the government whip. I think the point has been made, but it's patently obvious from even a very quick perusal of this document that this is a report of the committee which considered allowances and salaries, allowances being financial payment to individual MLAs for doing certain jobs, not funding for caucuses. The section in the report is very obviously dealing with what you would pay in terms of individual compensation to someone who is the leader of a recognized political party and has nothing whatever to do with the allowances that are paid for the operation of caucuses, for the hiring of staff and so forth, for communication, research, and so on, so it's not relevant.

But it is interesting that the language in this report is reflected in the current Legislative Assembly Act. The report says that the allowance

be paid to the leader of a recognized party . . . in the amount of \$5,000 [a year] on the conditions that the Leader holds an elected seat in the Legislature, his party has a minimum of four seats in the Legislature and received 5% of the total popular vote.

Now, that's partly reflected in the legislation with respect to payments that are made to the leader of an official party in terms of the legislation, which is one that's represented in the Assembly by at least four members, received at least 5 per cent of the popular vote in the general election previous to the year in which the allowance in subsection (2) is to be paid. So part of the language in the report was reflected in the legislation.

As Parliamentary Counsel pointed out at our last meeting, this

particular legislation in this clause, section 42(1), only deals with payment in terms of compensation to the leader of a political party whose caucus is represented in the Legislature. It naturally follows that you wouldn't pay that to somebody who wasn't the actual leader of the party because it's talking about payment in compensation and has nothing whatever to do with the funding for the operation of caucuses, which has already been set by precedent and which has been established when Grant Mitchell stepped down as leader – the Liberal caucus continued to receive the leader's allowance funding for their caucus – when Howard Sapers became the acting leader, and again when Nancy MacBeth became the leader in the period before which she obtained a seat. When the New Democratic caucus lost its leaders, one in an accident and the other due to a resignation, that funding was continued for our party, so I don't see how we can ask for anything less for another party which is in a very similar situation.

You know, I don't know how this particular piece of research is relevant to the precedents. If that is all the research that the Progressive Conservative caucus can come up with to justify their position, well, thanks for playing. But, Mr. Speaker, maybe what we should do once we deal with this motion is to deal with an increase in the research budget for the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Campbell, followed by Mr. Boutilier, Ms Blakeman, then Mr. Hinman.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Chair, I was just going to say that this is pertinent because this is where it all started, 1979. This is where the ideal came from. It's not a matter of saying: well, you know, it's sour grapes. I mean, this was made by the committee in '79, based on '78. This is where this all started from.

Again, I think it's important that we differentiate between the three parts. You have the members' caucus money, which is \$67,000. You have the research caucus money, which the NDs and the Wildrose and the Liberals all get, on how many members. Then there's the leaders' allowance, and that's what we're talking about today.

I mean, the Wildrose can talk about democracy and everything else, but the fact of the matter is that when the Member for Calgary-Glenmore came into the Legislature, he was the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore. Once this issue arose, all of sudden we get his letterhead that has him as the acting leader for the Wildrose Alliance caucus in all matters pertaining to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

I recognize one leader of the Wildrose party. She was nominated at a convention, and they had their vote, and she won the election. She's the leader of the Wildrose. That's who I recognize. Until she steps up to the plate and runs for a position in the next election, you know, we stay as we're at.

The Chair: Mr. Boutilier, followed by Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Hinman.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank your staff for the information provided for this committee. I am a nonvoting member, but I would like to say this ever so briefly. In my 14 years' sitting in the Legislative Assembly, I know Albertans are principled people. I first of all want to say today to the hon. member and leader of the New Democratic party that his comments today – no matter what else is said in this Legislature, in my 14 years it's perhaps one of the most marked and memorable moments. He speaks today as a member of principle. No matter what political party, I think in all of ourselves there's an inner voice, and we have

that inner voice. Today, I believe, Mr. Mason, through the chair, you spoke with that inner voice. It's the inner voice of Albertans because they are principled people. Each and every one of us is an elected member here. It's an honour and a privilege to serve them, and we serve them because we know they are principled people.

I just want to say today that I think it's important to guard against self-deception, no matter what document you bring to this table today. I think, also, I encourage the government members, whom I was a part of for certainly almost 14 years, that you form the majority of this committee. I have confidence in you today that you will make the right decision and the principled decision on behalf of that core value that all Albertans have. I think Mr. Mason today truly summarized it better than anyone else with no motive other than the Alberta principle and core value of that principle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Hinman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and chair of this committee. It strikes me that there are two allowances being talked about here with the same criteria. The 1979 example brought forward by the government whip doesn't deal with the office allowance, which came later but clearly came under the same guidelines because we have it allocated to the Official Opposition today and to the ND opposition as well. But even in that there are precedents that have clearly been overruled or adapted to current times because we have a criteria of four members elected in the Assembly to form a party and the definition of a party that falls under the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta. We have the 5 per cent that is gained in a general election, which I'm assuming, Mr. Speaker – perhaps you can correct me – would not apply in the case of members who cross the floor because they weren't elected under that party and as part of that percentage in a general election, but correct me, please. The last criteria is an elected leader who is sitting in the House as the leader of the party and the leader of the party in the House.

2:40

We already have the precedent of the four members being elected that has clearly been overruled. For some time, for most of my time being elected in this Assembly – I think the deal was struck and approved by this committee in the late '90s of having the four members recognized as a party being eligible for the leader's stipend and the leader's office allowance because, in fact, the NDs do indeed get that to this day. They get the allowance, and they get the office allowance. Then we're looking at the precedent of the leader being elected, and that clearly has been overruled, as we've had a number of examples brought forward today where the leader was not elected but both the stipend and the office allowance continued.

The Chair: Sorry. Not to interrupt, but Mr. Mason does not get a personal stipend.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, okay. Happy to be corrected. Thank you very much. But certainly the office allowance for the leader definitely is in play, and that is what's being requested by the members of the Wildrose caucus that are here with us today. Okay. I see their heads shaking; they are in agreement with me. Thank you.

So the criteria that we're using to judge whether this is an appropriate request to this committee: what is the criteria that they are not meeting? The precedent of four members being acknowledged as a party has been relaxed. We know that, in fact, the NDs qualify for it despite the fact of them having anywhere between one

and three members elected in this Assembly. The precedent of having the leader an elected member of the party and serving in the House has clearly been overruled and accepted by this committee because we've had a number of examples already raised of people collecting the office allowance when they were not the elected leader of the party. Is the sticking point, then, the 5 per cent that's necessary from the general election? That argument has yet to be raised.

Mr. Mason: It's the 42 per cent.

Mr. Hinman: Here's the answer for that. In the last election we got . . .

The Chair: Well, I think it would really be helpful if we discussed this in the committee itself. Mr. Hinman, you want to proceed, then, if Ms Blakeman is finished?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I do put that forward as a question because I'm interested in exactly what criteria the Wildrose caucus has failed to meet. Thus far they seem to have met the criteria that has clearly been extended to the ND caucus, and everybody seems pretty happy about that. Nobody has changed it. So what's the difference?

The Chair: Do you want me to make a comment?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, sir.

The Chair: Okay. I really don't want to get involved in the debate because I think there have been some statements made in here that one really should take a little bit of leverage with. But in answering your question, I'll be very, very specific. Part of the so-called precedents that have been used from now and then, perhaps there's a little bit of flexibility associated with that, but I'm going to be very much to the point.

Grant Mitchell – and I was the Speaker – stepped down as the Alberta Liberal Party leader on April 20, 1998. Mr. Howard Sapers was recognized as Acting Leader of the Official Opposition, a sitting member in the Assembly, no other leader, the acting leader, because the other leader quit. On April 21, 1998, one day after Mr. Mitchell left, the party has no leader; the next day it has an acting leader. The allowance was afforded to the acting leader because there was no other leader.

Ms MacBeth was elected in a by-election on June 17, 1998, and after the appropriate time she was recognized as Leader of the Official Opposition July 7, 1998. Someone argued that there's a precedent associated with that. Mr. Sapers was a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta when he was recognized as the acting leader.

Some comments have been made about the situation with Mr. Notley. Well, again, I was a Member of the Legislative Assembly when Mr. Notley was around, but there was no concept of a leader's office allowance at that time. It did not exist. For somebody to go back and say, "Well, we've got precedents here," that simply is not correct.

In the year 2000, when Pam Barrett resigned as leader of the NDP, on the moment of her resignation, immediately thereafter, Dr. Raj Pannu, MLA, a sitting member of the Assembly, was appointed as interim leader of the party, and as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly I recognized him. It was immediate. They were in the House.

The allocation for the leader of the Wildrose Alliance, as indicated

by the Legislative Assembly Office in January of this year, could not be allocated because their leader was not an elected member of the Assembly, to answer your question very specifically.

Mr. Hinman.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'll go back to my letter of April 21, 2010, second page, halfway through. "Caucus budgets for opposition parties were created in 1982," to my understanding and the research that we've done in our caucus, so I think that those precedents are important.

The Chair: Mr. Hinman, I said that there was no leader's office allowance in 1982. That's what I said.

Mr. Hinman: Well, again, when you go back to 1982, at that point they were called opposition parties' allowances. That's why we used those words interchangeably. I'd agree with the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon that obviously it is confusing. We didn't think it was, but it's been made very clear to me today that this is very confusing.

That's why I think it needs to go back and we need to look at: what is the purpose or the meaning of funding these opposition parties? Is it funding for an elected leader? Is it funding for an opposition caucus? I think we need to ask those questions and be very concerned on how we vote on that because I believe that that's what Albertans believe it is. It's funding for the opposition parties, not funding for a leader to go and do as a leader pleases. It's caucus research funding. Again, that can be debated, but perhaps Members' Services will have to meet in the future again to change the wording so it is clearer because the precedents in my mind have been set but, obviously, not in other people's mind. I think it's because of the changing of the wording every time the committee meets.

I remember when I first got elected as leader of the Alberta Alliance and was in this House and presented to the Members' Services Committee, trying to get a budget then. I was originally only allocated the \$67,000 and no other funding to do any research for any of the committees or anything and struggled along with just that amount of \$67,000, no research funding. Then Members' Services later recognized that, and things were changed, and we got some research funding for the Alberta Alliance.

It is obviously confusing. Like I say, I apologize. I thought that it was clear, but that's always the problem when we all read and see what we want to see on those things. There's just, to me, a great opportunity here to renew the faith of Albertans that we're doing the right thing. Again, I'll say that we're presenting this as an idea, obviously, that's a little bit outside of what the Progressive Conservatives were thinking, but still the idea will be in your best interest. Albertans will look at it and say: it's good; you did the right thing.

Like I say, there are two old sayings. One is that it's better to do the right thing for the wrong reason, but it's even better to do the right thing for the right reason. The right thing to do is to fund the opposition parties equitably. Don't worry about the actual terminology, because obviously we can't agree on that, but I think we can all agree that we need to have funding in order for us to do our research, in order for us to do our best for the people of Alberta that are wanting changes.

I'd ask the committee to think seriously on how they vote on this. This is a great opportunity that's good for everyone in this House to raise the level of debate, the ideas, the research that's being done. That's very much what we need to do. We need to raise the level of the democratic process. Albertans are excited and engaged, whichever party they're supporting right now. They perceive that there's a real live game going on now, where for years they've said,

"Oh, it doesn't matter," you know, and go on. Albertans are engaging right now. They're watching. Let's give them a show that they're happy with, to see that the playing field is level, that we're doing the right things. We'll bring some exciting things into the House here in the next couple of years.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

2:50

The Chair: Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to correct one point, and that is the appointment of Raj Pannu as the acting leader of the NDP following Pam Barrett's resignation. I don't have the exact date of that appointment, but it was made at a provincial council meeting of our party at which I was present, and it was at least several weeks after the resignation of Ms Barrett. It was after, I think, I was nominated as the candidate to replace Pam Barrett, and that would have placed it closer to two months out. I can have the party office look that up and supply it to members of the committee if they wish.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, I recall that I was advised that Dr. Pannu would be the interim leader, and I recognized him as such as Speaker almost immediately. I don't recall two months.

Others?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: I've heard the word "question." I'm going to say once more: are there others?

If not, well, then, I will proceed. The committee has before it a motion put forward by Mr. Anderson. I'll read the motion again.

Be it resolved that committee members of the Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the leader's (caucus) allowance per annum funding in the amount of \$233,249 to the Wildrose Alliance caucus.

All those in favour, please raise a hand. Three in favour. All those opposed, please raise a hand. One, two, three, four, five. The motion is defeated.

Okay, committee members, then we'll move on to new business, point 5. There shouldn't be anything in your documentation book, and you have every right to ask: what does it mean, vehicle telematics service? A Member of the Legislative Assembly submitted a bill for OnStar for a vehicle. We rejected it, basically saying we had no provision to have that covered under any of the programs that we have, and I indicated: but I will take it to Members' Services and just share it with them.

Essentially, what this is is a request by a member. From a security point of view the argument being made was that the vehicle that the member owns had OnStar on it, and it cost X amount of dollars a year to keep OnStar. In this case it was a female Member of the Legislative Assembly who said that she often drove late at night and great distances and that this would be a very secure thing for her. My response essentially was: well, all Members of the Legislative Assembly have a tax-free allowance; that could be purchased under that – I personally have my own GPS which was purchased – and I would raise it with the committee to see whether or not there was any interest in the committee having us do even additional research in this regard.

Essentially, would it be a request that would be compensated for under the Legislative Assembly? That would be the case, presumably, with the constituency office allocation, so there would be no net cost to the Assembly. It would be a transferable thing. But I know GPS machines: \$150, \$175, I think, 200 bucks to buy one of

those things. It doesn't really cost anything after that. We've all got BlackBerrys given to us. We've all got telephones. So whether or not there is any interest in reviewing this vehicle telematics service, I'd go forward with it and do some more work on it and have the LAO do more work on it if the members here thought that it would be an appropriate thing to look at. I throw it open at that.

Did anybody have any comments? Proceed. If you have no comments, I think I just do nothing. Is that what that means? Do nothing. Okay. So much for that matter.

Members' Services allowance funding, 5(b). There was a letter, that should be in your file, from an hon. member that basically said – and the letter is in there – “I would like to ask that the Committee review the matrix for constituency funding allowances,” basically pointing out that some constituency offices are facing higher costs, wondering whether or not the matrix could be looked at. Well, okay. You have in your binder, then, a little bit of background on the matrix. This matrix idea came from a previous Electoral Boundaries Commission review when they basically looked at constituencies and tried to compare constituencies across Alberta, and they said that some constituencies are easier to represent than others for a whole bunch of reasons. They put in this matrix, and previous Members' Services have basically allocated constituency office funding on the basis of this matrix.

Whether or not the matrix itself has much validity is a debatable point, and some people may want to give new definition to what the matrix should look at. Within two weeks from now – today is the 14th; it should be within two weeks from now – I should receive the copies of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. They should be delivered to my office, I think, within two weeks from now, and they would then be provided to all members within minutes. I don't know if this commission is going to have a definition of a matrix in it or not.

But what we have done is brought you an update to May 31 of the allocations for constituency office budgets. Essentially, you'll see the flow chart that you have in here, prepared May 31, 2010. It basically shows the variance. Remember that we have been dealing with frozen budgets. Last year it was a frozen budget for the constituency office budgets. This year we remain with the same one, and you can see – is there an additional copy in here? Ms Blakeman, you don't have a copy, do you?

Ms Blakeman: I obtained one. Thank you.

The Chair: Oh, you did? Okay. Through surreptitious sources, or how did you obtain one? You got one from Allison?

Ms Blakeman: I phoned the Clerk's office and asked for it.

The Chair: Oh, good. That was available. That's right. Okay. So you can follow it then and there.

Ms Blakeman: I can.

The Chair: Essentially, on average for the 83 Members of the Legislative Assembly – this is on average; there is a bit of variance – about \$120,000 a year. Some will be a little higher than that. Some will be a little lower than that. Essentially, the \$120,000 a year: I've always viewed the fact that if members would look at between \$40,000 and \$60,000 a year for the staffing that they would have in their constituency office, recognizing that at least 25 per cent of the allocation that the staffer would get would be paid for by a separate source under the LAO, you would then have \$60,000 remaining. The average seems to be between \$20,000 and \$25,000

for the complete rent and operation of a constituency office. If you add that to the \$60,000, you'd go to \$85,000, and then you'd have approximately \$35,000 left over for communications.

But if you take a look at this flow chart, you'll see that in Edmonton the lowest is \$1,000 per month; the highest is \$2,649. In Calgary the highest is \$3,452; the lowest, \$968. Others: those are other cities in the province of Alberta that have a different range. In the rural areas \$2,531 to \$200 per month depending on where you are and how you want to deal with this. If you're close to the Legislative Assembly, I presume that you wouldn't even need to have a constituency office if you chose not to. But as far as I know, everybody does, and they work on that basis. So this is the variety of the whole thing.

When I come forward with a budget, that we'll present this fall, I'll have this all updated to the most recent contracts that we have within a matter of weeks of the time that the first Members' Services meeting is going to be held, particularly if there is a request for allocation increases. We've done very, very well in this component over the years in providing increases to this. We've always been very up to date in terms of salary adjustments. We've always been very much up to date in terms of housing costs and utility costs. We've kept up very, very well. I suspect that perhaps some new members will have offices that they may have to renegotiate contracts for. It may very well be that others will be coming up to their term renegotiation, so there may be a bit of adjustment.

But as far as I understand the economy of Alberta, I mean, it's not a booming economy as we had a number of years ago, where everything was escalating by double-digit numbers every couple of months, it seemed. Things seem to have settled down, so I don't know how this applies to individuals, but this is the update. We'll find out if we're going to have another matrix. We'll continue with an update review with respect to all of this, and this gives you an idea of where we're at. I'm open to any suggestions, questions, comments, or what have you from any member.

Ms Pastoor and Ms Blakeman.

3:00

Ms Pastoor: Thanks, Mr. Chair. On that matrix, the fold-out one that you were talking about, it says that it excludes utility costs. I was wondering why.

The Chair: Sorry. Tell me which one you're looking at.

Ms Pastoor: The big one, coloured.

The Chair: Okay. The coloured one. On about what line?

Ms Pastoor: For 2010, just right over on the far left-hand side. It's in red.

The Chair: “Excludes Utility Costs.” Okay. Sure.

Ms Pastoor: I was wondering why they were excluded. Certainly, that is what is going to affect a lot of rentals in the future. You know, July 1 our utilities are going to go up.

The Chair: Are they?

Ms Pastoor: Yeah. Wait and see.

The Chair: Well, that's just, to be fair, a graph, but I've got it broken down. If you look at 2007, you'll see it's on the far right.

Actually, the utility rates: anywhere from \$50 to \$300 a month.

I don't know if anybody has got any higher ones of the ones I looked at. I'm talking gas and lights. I don't know what else you're talking about.

Ms Pastoor: Gas and lights, yeah, but why would it not be included?

The Chair: Bridget, we have it. This is just a synopsis. This is just a synopsis in terms of it, but you can get a pretty good idea. Some people have the utilities included in there, others do not, so in terms of a variance. I know that in the case of mine, as I recall, I'm paying 800 bucks a month for the rent and 200 bucks a month on average for utilities. On average 200 bucks a month.

Dr. McNeil: We can update the utility costs.

The Chair: Yeah, and that will all be updated.
Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, chair of the committee. Three issues. The first is that I think, just picking up on the previous discussion, what a number of us have experienced in the urban areas – I can't speak for the rural areas – is a new move to separating operating costs out of rent and increasing the operating cost, as you just did in your example of your office. Where someone might have been paying in an urban area, let's say, a thousand dollars before, they're now paying a thousand dollars for rent and a thousand dollars for operating costs. So for a number of them, mine for example, it was, in effect, a doubling.

The Chair: In your little office you pay a thousand bucks a month for operating?

Ms Blakeman: No. I pay almost \$700.

The Chair: For water, gas, and what else?

Ms Blakeman: Operating costs, sir. That's how they do it. In urban areas that's what we're dealing with. They've separated it out, and from three years ago, when I paid one amount, now I pay two. That's how they're doing it in urban areas, so we have experienced a substantial increase in costs.

What I'm interested in and was not able to glean from your spreadsheet here is: what is the increase in average rental costs between 2003 and 2010, and how does that correspond to the increase in that portion of the budget for rental costs between 2003 and 2010? In other words, is it commensurate? Are you able to give us those figures?

The Chair: In fact, the increase has always been higher than the actual. The increases we've provided have always been higher than the increases on average that people have had to pay. But we can get the specifics for you.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would appreciate that. How is that information distributed?

The Chair: Every year we deal with this.

Ms Blakeman: I understand that, but you said that you'd get the information. Is it posted on the website or sent in the mail or what?

The Chair: No, no. The members in your caucus who've been

members of Members' Services always had this before the meeting. You've got a file someplace in your office, in your caucus offices.

Ms Blakeman: I understand that. You said that you would get that information for me.

The Chair: Yeah, as we go to this fall.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So the information I just requested would be delivered to our members on the committee in the fall.

The Chair: Yeah. An update, and they'd have all of the stuff in your files from the past.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The second part of my question is around the matrix. The discussion of the matrix was not in the interim report that was brought forward, and if that follows through, then we would not have a matrix that was designated by the boundaries commission. Could I request, then, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly that the Members' Services Committee consider striking, if that is indeed true and it's not in the electoral boundaries final report, a subcommittee to examine the concept and content of a matrix?

The Chair: Absolutely, but it would be the whole committee.

Ms Blakeman: Fine.

The Chair: Absolutely. It's done all the time. Every time there's Member's Services, we always talk about these things.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I know that. I've read the minutes. I just want to make sure that that happens because I think there's a considerable difference. At this point, looking at how the matrix falls out, I would argue that there is a disproportionate effect on the urban constituency offices versus the rural constituency offices, and it is not taking into consideration the reality of representing urban ridings in this day and age. It may well have when it was originally put into place and perhaps even when it was revised, but it, I would argue, does not reflect it now. I'd be very interested in seeing this committee examine a matrix or some other way of dealing with that if it's not in the Electoral Boundaries Commission report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Any others? Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I address this, the Clerk brought to my attention some news releases with respect to the appointment of Dr. Pannu as interim leader by the executive of the NDP subject to confirmation at the provincial council meeting, which I attended, which was somewhat later. So I'd like to apologize to you for not correctly identifying that issue.

The Chair: Not a problem. Memories do fade. It's understood.

Mr. Mason: Well, I just wasn't at the executive. I was at the council.

The Chair: Okay. I understand. It's not an issue.

Ms Blakeman, the information I have is that on May 31 for Edmonton-Centre you pay rent of \$655.21 a month, and you pay an operating account of \$536.21 a month, for a total of \$1,191.42. Do you think that is incorrect or what?

Ms Blakeman: No, and that reflects exactly what I was saying.

The Chair: That's not the thousand/thousand?

Ms Blakeman: No. I gave you a general example of something. You asked me if that was me. I said no and clearly outlined the difference.

The Chair: Okay. That's pretty reasonable, \$1,191.

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's a significant increase to me from what I was paying, which was the \$685. Since then, they took the operating cost out, and I now pay the rent and I pay the operating cost, which, you just pointed out, is almost matching the cost of the rent. So it's a significant increase for my office over a period of time, almost a hundred per cent increase. I would argue I didn't get a hundred per cent increase in the allocation of the budget that covers that.

Thank you for the time.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I did want to talk to the issue.

The Chair: Oh, absolutely.

Mr. Mason: I'm looking at the factors that go into the matrix. Population density, the area, urban-rural ratio, dependent population, the number of elected and appointed bodies, and the distance to the Legislature are the six factors. It does seem to me it might be a simple matter to just introduce an additional factor here based on the average rent, including the component that Ms Blakeman is talking about, as one of the factors. It strikes me as the most significant variable cost associated with a constituency office. We probably pay similar amounts. Utilities are probably similar. Other costs might vary a little bit, but the thing that's a significant component of our costs that varies the most is probably the cost of paying operating and rent for our space. You know, it seems to me that if we just introduce a seventh variable, based on the average rent in each area, it might be helpful.

The Chair: Yeah. Fair game. There's a tremendous variety in terms of utility costs from one to the next. It is quite a variety.

Any others? Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Just further and if I might disagree, respectfully, with my colleague, I think there's much more to be considered than just adding on the consideration of what's happening with rent and operating costs. I really think we need to relook at the criteria that are used for that matrix.

3:10

For example, if you look at the Edmonton and Calgary constituencies, none of them are above – they vary between, I think, a minus three and a minus 16 on that scale. Sorry. Calgary is between a minus three and a minus 12. Edmonton is between a minus nine and a minus 18. The rural ridings are between plus three and plus 16. So when this affects the amount of money that we're getting in our constituency budget, when you look at Edmonton and Calgary constituency offices being based on that matrix and all of them falling – the best they can do is a minus three – I would say that we need to really relook at that matrix.

For example, when it talks about groups that they have to deal with, it doesn't consider in here at all the elected and appointed bodies, Indian reserves, and Métis settlements, the number of local authorities in the division. This is meant to recognize the number of

meetings one has to go to and a number of other official bodies that an MLA, you know, is expected to meet with and understand and bring forward their concerns and issues. But it doesn't take into consideration, for example, community leagues. Every urban MLA is expected to attend community leagues' meetings, liaise with them, attend various functions and events that they put on. That's not recognized in this at all, yet they're a body that an urban MLA has to deal with. It doesn't recognize business revitalization zones, again another group that an urban MLA is expected to liaise with, attend their meetings, understand their issues, bring them forward to government or to related committees.

So, you know, I think there's a need to examine much more in this matrix than just adding on the rent. I think there are a number of points. The urban-rural ratio, that somehow fewer people living in a rural area makes it more difficult to represent, I think needs to be examined. It does not take into account, for instance, any of the urban ridings dealing with multiple language groups, dealing with the number of not-for-profit organizations that urban ridings increasingly deal with.

I think there are a lot of things that need to be considered under a matrix structure or, indeed, if it's a matrix structure we want to use as a way of allocating money to support an MLA and their constituency office.

Thank you.

The Chair: Others?

The bottom line is that the 83 MLAs in the province of Alberta do not have – there's not a wide variance of difference in terms of the constituency allocations that they get. There's a variance of perhaps no more than 10 per cent away from that norm. But, again, we'll see what happens with the electoral boundaries, if they say anything, and then we'll just bring this back as we go into the fall, recognizing that one of the key decisions that the members will have to make with respect to the budget for next year will be whether or not it will be another freeze year or an allocation year. That will be something that we'll start looking at in the fall.

The last item on the agenda unless there's anything else. Anything else that anybody wants to raise? Yes, sir, Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Campbell: Just for the next meeting, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, sir.

Mr. Campbell: I'd ask that we put on the agenda for the next meeting the MLA remuneration.

The Chair: MLA remuneration?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, and where we're going to go with that as far as the committee.

The Chair: Is this a subject that you want to advance, or is this a subject that was as a result of these consultations between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition?

Mr. Campbell: Well, it's something I'd like to advance, to find out where we're going with all this and what role we're going to take. I'm going to go back to the document of '79. I find it quite interesting.

The Chair: Okay. I'm assuming, though, that what you're talking about is a follow-through in terms of what was announced in the Legislative Assembly and the recent meeting between the Premier and Dr. Swann that somebody advised us of last time.

Ms Blakeman: This was pursuant to Motion 501?

The Chair: Yeah, that one.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. The date of the next meeting, then. When would members like to meet next? Is late September okay?

Mr. Rogers: Call of the chair.

The Chair: But then, you know, I'd call one next week because I like to see you. Okay. Late September.

A motion to adjourn? Thank you very much. Mr. Campbell has provided that.

Thank you, all.

[The committee adjourned at 3:15 p.m.]

