



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Wednesday, December 8, 2010
10 a.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)
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC)*
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)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)

* substitution for Robin Campbell

Also in Attendance

Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (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
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Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Clerk of Committees
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10 a.m.

Wednesday, December 8, 2010

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, ladies and gentleman. It's 10 o'clock according to our reading of the time. I welcome you all to this Special Standing Committee on Members' Services meeting. It has been scheduled for some period of time.

The first thing I'm going to do is go through the roll because we have members that are a distance away from us this morning. I am Ken Kowalski, and I am here. Mr. Campbell is represented by Mr. Evan Berger today. He is here, and I've been duly notified by his office. I saw Mr. Elniski a minute ago. Where did he go? Kent Hehr is on the telephone. Right, Kent?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I am. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. There's Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Elniski: Good morning.

The Chair: Mrs. Leskiw, you are here in person. The hon. Mr. Oberle is here in person, and Mr. VanderBurg is here. Mr. Weadick is on the telephone.

Mr. Weadick: I'm here.

The Chair: Perfect. So we're looking for Mr. Anderson, we're looking for Mr. Mason, and we're looking for Mr. Rogers, but we have a quorum, so we will proceed.

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Rogers is here.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers is here. We will proceed.

To our colleagues who are on the telephone, you interject at any time. Just identify who you are because we may have a problem identifying for ourselves who is on the line.

The call to order has been made.

The agenda. When we last met, in September, I indicated that a meeting would be called in the first week of December. We are in the first week of December. The meeting was called. I put out a memo two weeks ago and asked members to provide me with items that they would want on the agenda and to advise me by Wednesday of last week. I received nil other than 4(d), the motion on notice from September 28, 2010, from Mr. Anderson.

The agenda, then, was written, and since that time I've received further correspondence from Mr. Anderson, who wanted to raise another matter associated with a review of the package provided to MLAs, so we will add that as 5(b) under new business for Mr. Anderson.

There is your agenda. If members here or otherwise want to add additional items, would you identify those items now, please?

Mr. Elniski: Mr. Chair, I don't know if it's appropriate, but I have another time-crunch commitment here. Would it be possible for us to have a conversation about the budget estimates earlier in the agenda than number 5? Could we move that up?

The Chair: Well, certainly, we could do that, but we would have to have the approval of the committee to do it.

Mr. Elniski: Okay. I move that we move item 5(a) right in front of number 4.

The Chair: Does anybody have a concern with this? The others here all agree? Okay. That was unanimous to move, then, 5(a) up. I guess we'll call it the new 3(a).

Mr. Elniski: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Anything further on the agenda? Any other items to be raised? Mr. Boutilier.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Just in terms of the roll I don't think there's been any indication of other members that are here today that perhaps are not on the committee but are members of the Assembly. I want to take the opportunity to indicate that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is here.

The Chair: We've just gotten you in *Hansard*, on the record.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Anderson: The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is here, too, by teleconference.

The Chair: Okay. You're on now as well. Good.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. I know that I don't want this to come to Members' Services, but there seems to be a bit of a mix-up about Motion 501, so could I just address that at some point?

The Chair: Yes. I indicated that Mr. Anderson had basically sent a letter to all members the other day, that's dated December 7. So that, in essence, would be that.

Mr. Anderson, would that be correct, that it's essentially the Motion 501 item?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah.

The Chair: That's it. So it's on the agenda, Ms Pastoor.

Ms Pastoor: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Are there additional items that people want to see on the agenda?

Mr. Taylor from Calgary-Currie is joining us here as well.

Could we have approval of the agenda, then, please? So moved. Everybody agree? Okay.

Then the approval of the minutes of September 28, 2010. Any business arising out of these minutes?

Mr. Rogers: I move to adopt the minutes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers has moved the adoption of the minutes. All in favour? Okay. That's a majority. I haven't heard from everybody, but that certainly is a majority. That's done.

Then as a result of the decision we made a couple of minutes ago to move the 2011-2012 estimates, 5(a) new business, up to 3(a), we will now proceed with that. If you look in your binders, this is essentially a hold-your-own budget based on the discussion that we had in September. If you look at tab 5(a), the overview, in the document you have, I'll just give you the parameters once again that we dealt with. The LAO branch budgets do not exceed the 2010-2011 approved budgets. In the schematic that goes along with the budget, the numbers should be essentially the same, with a minor change of \$8,000, which we'll explain as we go through this.

The operational costs reflect a zero per cent change budgeted due to inflationary factors, and that's based on the October 2010 year-over-year CPI information for Alberta, the Alberta *Weekly Economic Review*, dated November 26, 2010, from Alberta Finance and Enterprise.

The LAO branch compensation rates will remain frozen for the 2011-2012 fiscal year effective March 31, 2010, for all employees in the following classifications: senior officials, management, opted-out and excluded, and excluded administrative support. This freeze includes general increases, in-range adjustments, merit increases, and annual increments. In addition, the achievement bonus program remains suspended at this time, and this parallels what is being applied across the Alberta public service.

For budgeting purposes 80 sessional days and 70 committee days are anticipated.

Employer premium increases for enhanced medical plans will be offset by cost reductions across the organization, and no additional funds will be requested.

In terms of the MLA administration budget for member remuneration adjustments a zero per cent change is budgeted. That applies to the average weekly earnings index that might have kicked in on April 1, 2011. That's deferred to zero. No change to the members' services allowance formula with respect to all the orders we have: inflation, market adjustment, merit adjustment. No increase in the postal rate for individually addressed mail, and an inflationary factor of zero per cent to the element in section 1(3)(c).

For caucuses and independent members' budgets the caucus budget adjustment is zero per cent, and each budget reflects the number of private members in that caucus.

Election preparedness. We're in this strange position whereby constitutionally there must be an election within five years, but by tradition in Alberta there's usually an election four years after the last election. As the last election was March 2008, one has to project in terms of this budget for an election in March of 2012, but one doesn't have to be there till 2013. In other words, we would then have to look to see what kinds of issues we would have in terms of election preparedness, and whatever they are, the minor ones we'd just simply absorb in the budget in places where we've attempted to be frugal.

Funding of other allowances and entitlements for additional MLAs is not included in this budget. Let's assume that there's an election in March of 2012 and that the number of MLAs in Alberta moves from 83 to 87. I'm assuming that this election, whenever it would be, would be late March, so the amount of dollars that would be required to carry those four new MLAs would be for a week or two, and we've absorbed that in this budget as well. There is one item, though, that I will come back to in just a second here.

Special funding requirements. As all members know, by the summer of 2012 the federal building should be ready for occupancy, and there will be large moves for all of us, for our offices and what have you, to this new building. We've been working on this for several years now. There are some costs required although I have to say very, very thankfully that Alberta Infrastructure is picking up most of the cost associated with this – the renovation, the move, and what have you – but there are some things that basically we're going to have to do under special funding in terms of mostly electronics and communications stuff.

The money that we had budgeted for electoral boundaries: we just transferred those dollars, so there's no increase in this overall budget at all. It's the replacement of those dollars, about \$250,000 under that.

10:10

The one item that I want to draw to your attention, that we have not provided provision for in this particular budget, has to do with

the registered retirement savings plan. In 2008 the election was held in March. Our rules say that a member is eligible for RRSP contributions in a fiscal year. March was part of the fiscal year 2007-2008, so those MLAs who were elected in the latter days of March of 2008 were eligible for an RRSP deposit, and then when it turned April 1, they got another one.

I was surprised at that at the time, and I said: "Okay. We'll make a mark for this." I just don't think that is the way it should be, so I've provided no funding in this particular document for the provision for newly elected MLAs, elected for the first time in late March of 2012, to get an RRSP contribution, say, on the 28th day of March and then three days later get another one.

I think that there's a mechanism we have to provide here to work out basically that we have to pro-rate it for the time of the election or deal with it in a particular quarter. But I've provided no dollars in this, and we have time between now and then to basically find the right words for an order with respect to this. I just wanted the members to be aware of that. I'm not carrying it in here. It's not carried in here. If you feel that it should be carried in here, well, then we would have to add an exponential amount of – well, take your guess. If it's 30 new MLAs that would come, it would be 300 and some-odd thousand dollars or the like. But I've added nothing in there.

That's just a quick overview. If members have questions on the quick overview, let's deal with them now, and then we'll move on.

Mr. VanderBurg: So, Mr. Chairman, you're just going to bring back some wording at a future meeting to address that issue that you just raised?

The Chair: That's exactly correct.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. That's all.

The Chair: If you look, then, in that particular binder, there's some economic information. In the November 26 printout from Finance and Enterprise it basically shows that Alberta's year-over-year CPI inflation rate was 1.2 per cent in October, but on the next page, if you take a look at an interesting thing, the average weekly earnings index in the province of Alberta is projected at September to be 4.7 per cent. Now, one should be very cautionary about that because that's just a September to September item, and usually what happens is that they go the 12 months, the calendar year, and then three months after the fact, the last day of March, Statistics Canada points out what it really is. So we don't know what it really is, but remember what happened a couple of years ago when the government had an agreement with the Alberta Teachers' Association. The number changed dramatically, and then there had to be some renegotiations.

Mrs. Leskiw: What tab are you on?

The Chair: You don't have that? Sorry about that. Okay. The number for the average CPI inflation rate was 1.2 per cent October to October, and the average weekly earnings index is 4.7 per cent September to September. But this budget carries a freeze on that. This budget implies that there will be no adjustment for MLAs or anybody else on April 1 of 2012, just as part of the overview.

The next tab shows you the budget estimate, and it says: Estimate Comparison by Center Code. Essentially, it's a hold-your-own budget. The reason that the net expenditure for 2011-2012 is \$57,894,000 as opposed to the 2010-2011 estimate of \$57,886,000 is that we anticipate an \$8,000 reduction in revenue. So if you look

at the number just above, it's dropped from \$564,000 to \$556,000, and that shows you where the \$8,000 basically applied. Everything else follows through to a total voted expenditure of \$58,450,000, as it was last year. All of the numbers are there. There were a few little revisions internally to deal with the issues that we've dealt with during the year, but the numbers are the same, one and the same.

If you take a look to see where the variances would be following that one, some numbers do change in a minor way. The Legislature Library will see a reduction of \$65,000; House services will see a reduction of \$134,000; visitor services, a \$5,000 reduction; but Legislature committees, an increase of \$44,000 because of the funding for the Select Special Lobbyist Act Review Committee that's required under legislation.

The RRSP one was adjusted by the people who run this thing in Canada, \$725 per MLA, so you did that number, and you've got it at \$60,000.

Government members' services: a change in the number of private MLAs in caucus, a reduction of \$202,000.

Official Opposition services: a change in the number of private MLAs in caucus, a reduction of \$68,000.

Wildrose Alliance opposition services shows that increase as compared to their current budget.

Independent members' services: funding to support one independent, \$164,000; the second independent, \$164,000. Of course, the other independent, Mr. Boutilier, has now joined the Wildrose caucus, so that shows a reduction.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission: a reduction of \$351,000.

The federal building redevelopment project: a provision of \$258,000 for some costs that were not anticipated at the beginning.

That is an overview of those variances.

Does anyone have a question with respect to any of this?

Mr. Anderson: I do, Mr. Chair, when you have a moment.

The Chair: Please proceed. Is that Mr. Anderson?

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Sorry.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Anderson: When would be the appropriate time to bring forward my motion about caucus allowances and so forth? Would this be the appropriate time?

The Chair: Well, if we do the overview first, then we come back to it because your motion is on notice under 4(d).

Mr. Anderson: Okay. That's fine. I'm just checking when I should bring this forward. Thanks.

The Chair: Absolutely. Okay.

Does anybody else have a question? Yes, Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask about the provincial government's freeze with respect to salaries and so on. Can someone tell me: since AUPE settled in the third year of its three-year agreement for a 4.3 per cent increase in 2009, was that overridden in some way so that they did not receive that? Does anyone know? We've customarily used that as a benchmark for allowances in our caucus budgets for increases to our staff. I know the government has said that there's a freeze, but did they actually roll back or overrule the collective agreement that they had with AUPE that concluded last year?

The Chair: Mrs. Scarlett, can you help in that regard? I don't know the specific answer.

Mrs. Scarlett: I'll go back and check my dates. The salaries and the pay structure that we parallel is that for the opted-out, excluded, management group of the public service, and their increases or adjustments are April 1 to March 31 of every fiscal year.

Mr. Mason: Those were the ones that were frozen by the decision of the government last year. I understand that the wage increase for AUPE members that was previously negotiated was in fact passed on to them last year. They're currently negotiating for the 2010 agreement but don't have one at the present time.

I guess I'm going to make a case that a similar increase should be added to our caucus budgets so that we can pay for increases in our staff salaries. We, of course, as members know, had an agreement with our staff, which has been overridden by the committee and by you, Mr. Speaker, but it is creating difficulties for us. I won't go into those in detail, but in terms of staff retention and so on, this is an important question for us, and I'd appreciate, you know, the chair's direction on how I can proceed with this.

The Chair: Well, once we finish the overview, I'll recognize you. Okay?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you.

10:20

The Chair: Recognizing that all employees associated with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta are in the opted-out, excluded classes, and that has been the case.

So the next page after that particular overview is the breakdown, then, on the specific branches and allocations. We can go through this tab by tab and then have questions at the end or go through it and have questions as we go through it. The first one is self-explanatory. Financial management and administrative services: same manpower, same budget.

Human Resources: same number of people, same budget.

Office of the Speaker: the same number of staff, same budget.

Legislature Library: a small reduction and the reduction of one staff because there was the movement of people about. Well, you can see the movement. There's one person that went from the library to House services, so you can see that House services went up one and the previous tab went down one and the adjustment that goes along with it.

Visitor services: same staff component, a small reduction in the budget.

Information technology services, same staff, same budget.

Legislative committees: same staff, again, and an expenditure increase of \$44,000 in those budgets. For legislative committees I indicated earlier what the variance was associated with, that one special select committee.

MLA administration: there's an adjustment in there. In terms of total administration it's pretty much the same, but there is the difference of about \$60,000 in there, and, Clerk, you'll have to explain to me again where that \$60,000 adjustment comes from.

Dr. McNeil: That's the RSP.

The Chair: Oh, that's right. That's the RSP contribution side. Okay.

The government members' budget is based on \$67,407, based on 42 members. It shows a decrease because of consequential change in caucuses during the year.

The Official Opposition budget: the same applies, based on the \$67,407 plus the reduction because of one person.

The next one, Wildrose opposition budget, is there. It's based on four members.

The ND opposition budget is there. It's based on two members.

The independent members: the first one is Mr. Taylor, his budget, and there should be one in there for Dr. Sherman as well. Okay. Dr. Sherman is beside that. Then the third page basically shows the reduction the other way because of the change in the status of Mr. Boutilier.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission: we have completed that. That goes to a zero budget. Essentially, the remainder is just that emphasis of the 250 some-odd thousand dollars for the renovations to the new federal building.

I apologize. My head sometimes swims with this cold.

So that's the conclusion of the overview. If there are discussion, comments, or issues or concerns you want to raise now, please do that.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chairman, I remember the discussion on the Fort McMurray allowance, but it's a little fuzzy. Was that a special amount of dollars given to the constituency staff because of the location?

The Chair: The northern allowance, yes.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. And no other constituency gets that?

The Chair: No.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay.

The Chair: Others? Mr. Boutilier.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. I think as a point of clarification, Mr. Chairman, it's my understanding that in the Peace Country there's a percentage of that, actually, that they contribute. It's my understanding that it's a certain percentage of the northern allowance there. Perhaps you can provide more detail on that, Mr. Speaker. In my discussion with the Member for Peace River he indicated that he gets a certain percentage, not exactly the amount that was received in northern Alberta.

The Chair: Cheryl, can you help on that one? To my knowledge Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is the only one.

Mrs. Scarlett: Yeah. The northern allowance provided to those employees that are north of that certain line is a flat amount except for those employees that are paid on an hourly, part-time basis, in which case it's prorated.

The Chair: Okay. Others?

There is the budget. There may be business arising out of the budget. I did indicate that I would recognize Mr. Mason. Should I recognize him now, or do you want to deal with the budget and then add a subsequent recognition of Mr. Mason after?

Proceed, Brian.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move a motion that the salary component of the LAO budget be increased by 4 per cent to reflect increases in the cost of living and

the increases that have been provided to unionized government employees. If I can speak to it.

The Chair: Absolutely. Do you have a motion that we might want to take a look at, or is that self-explanatory the way it was?

Mr. Mason: I hope it's self-explanatory. I've not written it out. I could do that.

The Chair: We don't usually require seconders for all of these motions. If somebody wants to second it, fine. If not, we'll just go on.

Mr. Mason: Do we need a seconder?

The Chair: No. I said no. You go forward.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, in terms of our caucus I think we strongly feel that our staff have been held back in terms of their earning capacity, and it creates issues for us with respect to staff retention and so on. I also think that we need to examine whether or not the LAO, whose budget is set by this committee and not by the Legislative Assembly, is necessarily bound by a government policy change, which only applies to out-of-scope employees of the provincial government.

I think that it's quite unfair when the unionized employees received a 4.3 per cent increase in 2009, and current negotiations are ongoing for 2010. It's also unfair with respect to the decision-making that has happened in this committee and in government with respect to our income. This committee voted for a substantial increase in remuneration for MLAs, based on additional work, that being the standing committees that were established, and then the government voted itself a similar increase.

Having just done that and given ourselves a significant increase, then the government freezes the salaries for out-of-scope employees, who seem to be singled out because the majority of employees, of course, are in scope, and they're not covered because there is an agreement, which the government is respecting. Then, of course, the politicians all have walked away with a substantial increase. I don't think it's fair, and I think that we should adjust this budget to reflect an increase for all out-of-scope employees under the LAO.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking to Mr. Mason's motion, with all due respect, certainly I can't speak to your particular experience with your staff, but you know, leaders have to lead. Union contracts: we made a commitment in our government that we would respect all contracts. Now, I can't speak to exactly how the process transpired as a private member, but the general discussion in our government was that all contracts would be respected, and I believe they have been. To link the AUPE contract to what we're discussing here – I think, frankly, that this room is not the place for that discussion.

We as leaders, the people that make up the LAO, have to lead by example in this economy that we find ourselves in in this province. We are trying to set the tone yet still respect the collective bargaining process. We're going through a process of collective bargaining with our employees of AUPE right now, and no one wants to presuppose where those negotiations will end. However, it's important that leaders set a tone, and the tone is that we are holding the line. I certainly can't support your motion, and I won't be voting for it.

Thank you.

10:30

The Chair: Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a great deal of sympathy for the arguments that Mr. Mason is bringing forward in that he has pointed out, I think, a fundamental unfairness that exists here. However, that unfairness also extends to all constituency office employees. That unfairness also extends to all employees of the LAO. So through you to Mr. Mason: does his motion anticipate that all employees will get a 4 per cent raise should it pass, or is he just referring to caucus staff? In speaking to the motion he seemed to be most concerned about caucus staff.

The Chair: I think he said: everybody. My understanding is that his motion basically said: increase the salaries of all LAO associates.

Others?

Mr. VanderBurg: What would be the total impact on the budget, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: I have no idea. Sorry. We can do a guess; that's about it.

Cheryl, what would we guess? Four per cent of all the salary components of the LAO, everybody?

Scott? Just a guess now.

Mr. Ellis: Salaries are probably \$30 million. That would be members included. I'd be guessing off the top of my head that it could be in the neighbourhood of \$700,000 or more.

Mrs. Scarlett: For clarification purposes to the first question that was asked, as was mentioned, staff of the LAO parallel those adjustments granted to the opted out, excluded, and management group of the public service. Those salaries were frozen as of April 1, 2010, and that freeze in the public service is intended to be for two years.

For the government employees that are under the union agreements, their agreements have always been six months behind those for the opted out and excluded. The last union agreement, as I understand it, was a three-year agreement, from September 2007 until August 2010, and has just expired. The last increase that they would have received in the third year of their contract was effective as of September 2009. That contract has now expired, and they're in negotiations.

In the past when there have been adjustments, the opted out and excluded have received them in April of the year, and normally those adjustments are similar if not equal. The union would get that adjustment six months later. In this cycle that we're referring to, the bargaining agreements, the union agreements are six months after those adjustments that normally are applied to opted out and excluded.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. VanderBurg, do you want to get back in?

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, to the member, you know, I agree with the zero increase in this budget. Is the member suggesting that we find the money within the budget and do some reallocation and take research money and divide it up? You're saying: new money.

Mr. Mason: It's an increase to the budget, yes.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. I see some merit in a redistribution somehow, but I don't see any merit in increasing our overall budget.

The Chair: Additional comments on this subject matter? Mr. Oberle.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to point out that what the government has negotiated in a contract with the AUPE or how the government deals with opted-out government employees is irrelevant here. We have an agreement in this committee, struck last year, on how we were going to proceed with the payment of the LAO employees. This committee sets the wages. Last year we decided to tie them to some government decision, but the budget proposal before us is for this committee to decide what we're going to pay our employees, not what the AUPE may or may not negotiate in their upcoming contract. The proposal before us, in the budget at least, is a zero increase, and I support that.

The Chair: Others? Well, then, should I call the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The motion as moved by Mr. Mason is that there be a 4 per cent increase in salary of all those associated with the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta except Members of the Legislative Assembly.

All those in favour, please say aye or otherwise get my attention. Those opposed, please say no. Okay. That's not going to go forward.

We're back now to the main budget. Additional questions on the budget, or could I have a motion with respect to this so we can proceed?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, maybe this would be the appropriate time to bring up that motion since it will affect the budget. Should I do it now?

The Chair: Well, we did the approval of the agenda already, and it was left at 4(d).

Mr. Anderson: I know. I'm just saying that if we do it now – it might have budget implications if we do it after. We might have to come back and reapprove.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, if it's approved, it would be added to the budget.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. All right. We can talk about it later, then. Sure. Whatever you want.

The Chair: Well, no. The committee did the approval of the agenda. They did it already. We have an agenda in front of us, and that wasn't requested to be moved forward, so I think we have to be quite judicious in terms of how we're dealing with this.

As a result of the request to move this matter upward, we now have to deal with the 2011-2012 Legislative Assembly budget estimates. Is anyone prepared to move a motion of approval, of support? Mr. Elniski. If there was a seconder, it would be Mr. Rogers.

Any discussion? Mr. Boutilier.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you. My observation of this budget is that it essentially holds the line, but I draw your attention specifically to an issue. With absolutely no disrespect to opposition members from any party, it is my observation that the budget that is being proposed in the motion put forward indicates that, for instance,

to use one example – and God love them for the good work that they do – the members of the New Democratic Party have two elected members and are proposed to have a budget of \$561,000. The Wildrose have four elected members and, it's being proposed, a budget of \$463,000, essentially \$98,000 less. Could someone please explain to me why two elected members would receive a budget of \$561,000, yet four elected members would receive \$98,000 less?

The Chair: I think that matter is on the agenda under 4(d), a motion on notice from Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I think, with all due respect, it would be germane to the issue we're talking about at this time.

The Chair: Anyone wish to participate? Is there anything further?

Mr. Anderson: Again, Mr. Speaker, I do understand that we're on the agenda, and I'm not trying to undermine that. It's just that if we're going to be passing a budget and then going to another motion that could affect the budget – we'd have to come back and rejig the whole thing if that motion was passed.

The Chair: Our tradition has always been that it becomes an add-on.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I don't think we in the Wildrose want an add-on. We would like to do it from within the budget.

The Chair: Well, it would be part of the budget.

We currently have a motion with respect to the approval of the budget for 2011-2012, moved by Mr. Elniski and seconded by Mr. Rogers. Does anyone else wish to participate? Shall I call the question? Would all those in favour please say aye or otherwise give me their approval? Anybody opposed? Okay. It has been approved.

Then we move on to 4(a), members' professional development. It says: the chair. Some time ago at one of these meetings Mr. Anderson basically put forward a submission with respect to professional development, and you'll see the information in the binder. We indicated at that time, as a result of Mr. Anderson's request, that we would look at the possibility of basically allowing provision for members to attend these professional development conferences. There is a background paper that goes along.

10:40

Basically, we point out that there's opportunity for members in our system to deal with travel and temporary residence allowances. They have a tax-free expense allowance. There are caucus budgets. There is interparliamentary professional development. An addition to this would have been to basically allow members to attend professional development conferences. I'm assuming that this would be within the province of Alberta.

On the basis of a member's professionalism, to attend a nonpartisan educational session, symposium, lecture, conference, or course will help the member in fulfilling their role as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. We would monitor this, and it would be essentially – professional development sums it all up without explanation, that it's something to assist the member, not to attend an event that would involve perhaps partisan activities but, in essence, nonpartisan educational things. The proposal we put forward is that the LAO could monitor expenses towards \$2,500 per annum and report to members on a monthly basis. But this would come out of a member's constituency allowance, so there would be no added cost to anything.

We have reviewed this. We've looked at this. If you feel that this is something we should proceed with, we can deal with it now. Otherwise, we'll just have it as an update and bring it back at a later date.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, in my nine years here I feel that our policies that we have in place have served me as a private member very, very well. I can't remember the exact kilometres that we're allowed to use outside the constituency, but there is an amount that we can use already that has worked for me. I base that out of Edmonton. You know, you have an office meeting, and if there is something that I want to attend in Calgary or in Lethbridge, it's worked. I guess I'd like to know from Mr. Anderson, who's with us: can you give me some examples of what you're talking about? Maybe there's something that I've missed here.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson: Sure. Well, I remember during the whole discussion around the royalties that there were a couple of conferences, energy conferences, one in Banff and, I believe, one in Calgary, over that two-year period that I was with the government that I very much wanted to attend. They were reasonably pricey. I can't off the top of my head remember, but it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$500 for the conference. Those were things that I was very interested in attending because I thought that if I attended them, I could learn a little bit more about, you know, the energy industry, talk with energy people there to see what their concerns were with the new royalty framework, et cetera, et cetera, rather than have to line them up on a separate occasion over a longer period of time at my constituency office or go to see them.

I thought that that would be a very good use of money and resources out of my constituency budget given the huge amount of people that work in the oil and gas industry that live in my constituency who were very concerned about the NRF. That would be one such example.

I think that, you know, when I look at some of the other things that money is spent on in our constituency budgets – I won't go into details. If one wanted to in their budget plan for their constituency budget take a portion – say, buy fewer gifts for constituents or whatever, you know, a little bit less paper, a little bit fewer envelopes and postage – and devote that, instead, to professional development in areas where their constituents are concerned, where they want their representative to have a better knowledge of the subject, then I think that that should be left in the hands of the MLA, at least to some extent. That would be one such example.

Ms Pastoor: Could I address that as well?

The Chair: Yes, Bridget. Go ahead.

Ms Pastoor: It often isn't the expenses that are the problem, because we do get paid mileage, and we can get, you know, rooms paid for and those sorts of things. Often, as Mr. Anderson has pointed out, it's the expense of the actual registration. Some of the things that I would like to go to would be in my capacity as a critic. I'm very interested in agriculture, and there are many, many learning opportunities in that area, so I think that that would again be an example of personal development. Although I'm going as the critic – and that could be an argument against it – I think that anybody that sits in the House that has a chance to improve their knowledge of whatever they're responsible for should be looked at.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. The idea, if we were to go with this, is that essentially it would offer us an opportunity to change priorities or reprioritize some of what we deal with through our constituency funding, something like this, monitored through FMAS. The key point for me here is: no additional costs. If this were to be an item that was allowed to be reprioritized from our constituency funds, just as long as it's clear – it's important that we have clear guidelines around how we use those funds, and if this becomes an item that is allowable with monitoring, obviously, by FMAS, I think it could be helpful.

The Chair: Mr. Elniski and then Mr. Oberle.

Mr. Elniski: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have to take the same stand that I took on this the last time this item came up, and that is that I do not support this, primarily because we already receive a \$26,049 tax-free allowance as MLAs. We are, therefore, free to do with those funds as we choose. I think that my constituency budget is at this moment in time just barely adequate to serve the needs of my constituents. If I choose to engage myself in professional development activities, I have a fund already available to me to do that, so I can't support this.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Can I be added to the list?

The Chair: Absolutely. You can go right now, before Mr. Oberle.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. I've spoken to this before, when this motion was put forward one other time, and I think Mr. Anderson actually put this forward in the past. I'm of the view that if you want to go attend some professional development, whether me, Mr. Anderson, or otherwise, we should do that on our own dime or through some other facet of money that may be available through other means, but it shouldn't be coming from our constituency budget scenario. I won't be supporting this motion, and I would urge people not to do it and to keep our budgets the way they are and use priorities for our constituents.

The Chair: Mr. Oberle.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to weigh in here. Mr. VanderBurg is correct that our expense budgets quite adequately cover our expenses of attending an event. We can claim mileage anywhere in Alberta, and we have up to 10 hotel rooms a year that we can get anywhere in Alberta, so we are able to travel and cover expenses.

I want to point out first of all that the constituency budget is intended for service directly to your constituents. I certainly use mine to its fullest, and I'm not willing to cut it back. I guess other members might be. It's not intended for our own benefit or personal growth or professional development.

Second of all, all members are aware that we have a tax-free allowance. That's an allowance, and somehow over the years it's become viewed as part of our salary or an entitlement somehow. I note that in Mr. Anderson's letter, which I think we might be dealing with later, regarding a review of MLA remuneration it's treated as if we get a portion of our salary as tax free. It's not a portion of our salary; it's a tax-free allowance, recognizing that we have extraordinary expenses as MLAs that perhaps the average person wouldn't. I would count attending seminars as being one of those. That's precisely what that allowance is intended to cover, so I would not be in favour of any change to that.

10:50

The Chair: Well, we have no motion thus far. We have an item that was brought to the table. We can bring this to a head via a motion that can be voted on, or we can just leave it in abeyance for another day. Any thoughts?

Mr. Boutillier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate all of the comments that have been made by the members. If I understand the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's initiative correctly, or what other term you want to call it relative to professional development, it's quite simply this: if there is a forestry conference that is held in Calgary, and the registration fee is \$500, under the existing constituency budget that \$500 is not covered. I think all of us are aware of the provision of the 10 days or mileage. This is about the registration fee to participate in a conference that can help your constituency members.

I don't think we should lose sight of the fact that this is about the registration cost that ultimately, right now, some members indicate, I think, is a benefit to your citizens if it was in forestry or in royalties or whatever. If I understand, through the chair to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, it's about covering that registration cost that would go along with a conference that could be considered helpful to your constituents. Is that correct?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Sorry. I just had a blackout here, so I'm just calling back in on the cellphone. I didn't get the end of what the Member for Peace River was saying, and I apologize.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, the Member for Peace River gave an explanation of why he could not support the concept. I indicated that we had no motion at this point in time yet. Mr. Boutillier got in and spoke in favour of the whole idea. I suggested that if we want to deal with this thing one way or the other, we should have a motion that we can actually put into words. The question is: do we deal with a motion today on this, or do we just hold this matter in abeyance and bring it back another time?

Mr. Anderson: I would be in favour, Mr. Chair, of holding it. It's clear from the comments being made around the table that for whatever reasons given there is some support, but there's not a majority of support. So I don't want to waste the committee's time further on this, obviously.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Anybody else have a comment on this?

Ms Pastoor: I would support that it just sort of sit there in abeyance as well.

The Chair: A pending item.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. A pending item. I'd like to suggest that the next time we look at this – I think this is coming, probably, with an opposition slant. I'm not sure, when just the government caucus members go to these things, who actually pays for the registration for them to go. So I'd like to take a look at that.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Mr. Chair, just because it is, you know, something that I brought forward while I was with the governing party, I just want to say, going back to what the Member for Peace River and others, I think, were implying, that I think we all choose different ways to serve our constituents. I think that's clear by what

we think about and how we act in the House and the things like the caucus voting along party lines, et cetera, et cetera.

We all do different things that we think are in the best interests of our constituents, and one of the things that I believe is in the best interests of my constituents is to be fully aware and educated on the bills that come before the House and vote on them according to the best education and information that I can get and do so freely and without any regard to party line. Part of doing that job for my constituents means being educated on certain things that, as a lawyer, I wasn't educated on, for example energy. I had some exposure to it, but generally speaking I'm a layman on that issue until I educate myself on it, and that's what I've been trying to do over the last several years.

I think that it's a little disingenuous or incorrect to say that somehow trying to educate oneself in an area where there is a matter of great importance to one's constituents so that they can be a good spokesperson for their constituents rather than just for their party – spending monies out of our budgets in this way if we thought it was in the best interests of our constituents is completely appropriate.

That said, I understand there's not support for the idea, so, like I said, a pending item is fine with me.

Mr. Oberle: I'm also fine with leaving it as a pending item, but I need to clarify that I was not at all being disingenuous. I pointed out that there is a tax-free allowance that's intended to cover exactly such a situation. I might further point out that each of us as MLAs, regardless of our party, has available to us research money and positions, and that's precisely what they're for. At any time you can ask for a briefing, a paper, whatever form you choose, from your research staff. That's exactly what they're intended for, to provide you with information and expand your knowledge of a particular subject area.

Between your own research staff, which we have available to all of us, and our tax-free allowance, which is intended exactly to cover such situations, I think we've kind of got it covered, but I am prepared to entertain further discussion and, as you say, Mr. Speaker, leave it as a pending item for now.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, can I be added to the list?

The Chair: You'd be the last speaker.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. I just want to say for the record that I support the comments of Mr. Oberle one hundred per cent.

The Chair: Okay. Let's move on to 4(b), members' services allowance matrix. There is a minute coming out of the June 14 meeting that basically says, "The Chair agreed that if the 2010 Electoral Boundaries Commission final report did not review the current Matrix, then the Members' Services Committee would review the current Matrix as outlined in Constituency Services Order 1(3)," and it says that the action is for the chair. Well, okay. Since that meeting, as we went through September, I have received no information from any particular member. I reviewed the matrix – the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission had no comment with respect to it for whatever reason – and basically looked at the constituency budgets on the basis of the rents and everything else that we looked at in September and concluded in my head that as a result of the current Legislature we are in, there was no need to make further adjustments to the budgeting concept or the parameters concept with anything in this area and that it should just continue until whatever happens in the future after an election. I made no recommendations or suggestions in this area.

Comments, questions?

All right. Then under 4(c), approved absence from the House. This is an interesting little concept that has developed in recent years. You have in that tab a clause that comes out of the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta. This is the act; this is not the Standing Orders or the *Members' Guide* of the Legislative Assembly.

The act says:

34 Deductions shall be made from the indemnity allowance and the expense allowance of a Member at the rates prescribed by the Members' Services Committee for each day in excess of 10 sitting days during a session on which the Member did not either take the Member's seat in the Assembly or a meeting of a committee of the Assembly otherwise than by reason of

- (a) illness or injury,
- (b) bereavement, or
- (c) public or official business.

What this means is that if a member is missing for more than 10 days without one of these reasons, then in essence deductions can be made against their indemnity based on the Members' Services Committee rate. That rate could be one two-hundredth or one three-hundred-and-sixty-fifth of a year.

The fact is that we've never applied this – never ever applied this – but in the last number of years that I have been the Speaker, there have been situations that have developed where members have been away because they are looking after ill people in their family. The illness here would refer generally to the identification "illness of the member," but as we continue to grow older and as our parents continue to grow older, there have become circumstances where members have been away, including a recent one just several weeks ago when the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark missed the first eight days of the Legislative Assembly because, he basically indicated, he was dealing with his ill father. We had another situation several years ago where another member was basically away because of an aging and ill mother.

11:00

I simply want to have a provision in here for the protection of everyone, to find the words that would be added to the Legislative Assembly Act to basically cover that, because I have covered it. I have made sure that these members were not being penalized. I don't want the Auditor General or somebody else to come in at some later date and say: well, just a minute; you don't have the authority under the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta to do this. I'm saying that I think there are some very legitimate, compassionate reasons for that.

What I would want to do is that if this committee approves such a concept, we would find the words, and I would send a memo to the Government House Leader and ask that if there's a miscellaneous bill in the spring of 2011, this concept be added to miscellaneous bills. Then your caucuses would all agree under the miscellaneous statutes concept. That's basically what it is.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I would be fully in support of such a proposal if it still allowed for the event that a member, for example, held the Legislature in such contempt that they saw no reason why they should attend it.

The Chair: Contempt is not an official reason for absence.

Mr. Oberle: Nor is the illness of a parent, for example.

The Chair: Right now, yes. Correct.

Mr. Oberle: I'm saying that if we added those words, I would want to be careful how we dealt with it. I think you're absolutely right

that in the event of a family illness, a need to attend to family matters, we should all be protected in that regard, and it certainly happens. But I would want to be careful that we didn't extend the protection to an incident, for example – and I use the utter extreme – where someone purposely chose not to attend the Assembly.

The Chair: Absolutely. The other way, even without the miscellaneous thing, as long as the Members' Services Committee agreed to the interpretation by the Speaker, who is the key administrator of the LAO with the Clerk, if this is the understanding, then in essence we move forward. But if you feel that it's not a concept, well, then we have to apply other things. It's the general consensus of the concept of permitting this care for an ill family member as being one of the legitimate reasons for not being in the Assembly without penalty. If you agree to that, we'll try and find the words, and we'll deal with it.

Mrs. Leskiw: Will you be defining family member? The reason I'm asking is that I know that in our teachers' contract, when that was included, they actually defined a family member as husband, wife, child, father, mother, and so on so that people didn't use aunts and uncles and whatever. I'm just asking a question.

The Chair: Yes, there would be some refinement to that. But this is a very interesting definition today, family member, and how far you go with it. I mean, we've had massive debates in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta trying to define family. Again, there has to be common sense associated with this.

Mr. Rogers, you're next.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I was going along the same lines as the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I think it's very doable in compassionate terms that you would define immediate family member, so spouse, children, and potentially adding an immediate parent. I mean, we have smart people in the LAO that could draft that. I think it's important. I think of one of our members who lost his wife to cancer very recently, a year or so ago. I think that's a very legitimate reason that a member would be excused and not be in jeopardy of any penalties.

Obviously, it's not mentioned here, and I would expect that it would still be wrong in our Assembly, but I think of a famous Senator some years ago that spent years in Mexico and still collected his pay. Since then, I believe, our Senate pays you extra if you actually show up. I hope we'll never get to that here, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Well, we don't have a situation with any question of abuse of this at all. I have no record of that. We have no record of this at all. There were reasons why they happened, but I just wanted to make sure there's just that little bit of protection for everybody involved. Can I move forward with devising some kind of a concept in that regard, then?

Mr. VanderBurg: I still have the strong feeling that there has not been abuse, and I would prefer that the wording be more to empower the chair of this committee and that we have a general agreement around this rather than, you know, fixed words that we have to debate in the Legislature. That concept I would prefer, and I would put that out as a discussion point, that we come up with a wording to empower the chair of the committee.

Mr. Mason: I agree with that approach. You know, I remember twisting ourselves into pretzels to come up with a definition of adult interdependent partner, whatever that was, so that you didn't have to

say "married." I think it's a lot better to leave it to the Speaker's discretion. Of course, if someone feels unjustly dealt with, they can bring it here.

The Chair: Absolutely, and that's part of the appeal process. Mr. Oberle.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's an interesting concept, and I'd point out that it may actually not require legislative change. The clause empowers the Members' Services Committee to prescribe the rate by which a member's pay be reduced for reasons other than are already prescribed there. In this case the chair has already, I guess, in a couple of instances allowed a rate of zero to be applied to members whose parents were sick.

The Chair: Can I just make it very clear? Neither one of them exceeded 10 days, but they were right on. It never has happened, but the potential is there for it to happen. That is what I'm saying. That's the reason. This is just looking ahead. That's all.

Mr. Oberle: So this committee is already empowered to make that decision. Given our immediate schedule it would be difficult for us to deal with it on a case-by-case basis, but we could certainly empower the chair to do that. A motion in this committee, worded correctly, could deal with all of the issues that we need.

The Chair: Okay. I've got the concept. We'll come back with something with respect to that.

Now, 4(d) is the motion on notice from the September 28, 2010, meeting, Mr. Anderson. The motion on notice is under tab 4(d). It says:

Mr. Anderson's motion read into the record at the September 28, 2010 meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

For the 2011-12 fiscal year and subsequent fiscal years, the Members' Services Committee provide in the Legislative Assembly estimates for an opposition caucus allowance equalling at least one-half of Official Opposition caucus funding for any caucus constituting a recognized opposition party as defined in section 42(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act without affecting the discretion of the Committee to allocate all or some of that amount to a caucus that fails to meet the [requirement] for a recognized opposition party.

Mr. Anderson, you may proceed, please.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Well, we discussed this a lot the last go-round, and one of the reasons was that we have a budget already in place, this being the last Members' Services meeting I'm referring to. We talked about the fact that there is a budget in place, that we should defer this item until the next budget comes around, and that maybe the members would be willing to reconsider it. I agreed to that at the time, and since we're discussing or have discussed the budget today, I wanted to bring it back up again and see if members could be persuaded accordingly.

I just wanted to quickly review what our argument for this has been in the past or what our point has been for this in the past. Basically, as we've tried to document several times, the notion of a leader's office allowance, we feel, is prone to create some confusion, especially in the case where a party has changed leaders or for whatever reason there's not an undisputed party leader sitting in an opposition caucus. Though there aren't a ton of cases to look at throughout our history, it's not an unusual occurrence in our parliamentary system to have this type of leadership change. Parties change leaders and often decide to choose someone that is not a member of the caucus, and we feel that they should be free to do so

without fear that their legislative caucus will be crippled financially in any way with regard to their staffing and research and so forth.

11:10

In the past neither the LAO nor the Members' Services Committee has thought it necessary to insist that a caucus must have its party leader in the caucus to receive full caucus funding. In no previous case has the party's lack of a leader or choice of an unelected leader affected their caucus funding. For example, when the third-party Liberals chose Laurence Decore as their leader, the Nick Taylor led caucus received a leader's allowance from 1988 to '89. When Howard Sapers was declared acting leader in '96, the caucus continued to receive the leader's office allowance even while Nancy MacBeth was sitting outside the Legislature as their party leader.

Opposition caucuses, as has been discussed on numerous occasions, we believe, play an essential role in our system. We feel it's an important institutional function and that this important institutional function should be separate from purely party matters as much as possible. As the Clerk explicitly stated in our last meeting, Danielle Smith is not the leader of our caucus. If that's the case, it is therefore entirely mistaken to think that she has anything to do with our leader's office allowance. Just as with all our caucus expenditures, Paul Hinman would be the officer to whom this funding would be allocated, and as with all LAO funding it would be used strictly for the legislative activities of our caucus.

Because of the confusion that has stemmed from the name, we propose that the amount in question be reverted to the name that it was first given in 1986, that of opposition caucus allowance. If the committee sees fit, we would be open to an amendment to the motion retaining the current title so long as it is clear that every caucus is entitled to it regardless of party matters, including who their leader is or is not. We think that this is a sensible point. As we stated before, we feel that it's a flaw by insisting that only a party leader can receive the funding, and it is likely that this flaw is the reason that there's no precedent for it.

Mainly, the only additional duties the party leader has over legislative duties are party-related ones. This committee goes to great lengths to avoid funding anything partisan, which is right, but the only real difference between Brian Mason and Paul Hinman – well, there are actually quite a few differences between Mr. Mason and Mr. Hinman; I apologize for that, Mr. Mason – is that Mr. Mason has more party duties to attend to. Mr. Hinman has all the same demands inside the House in terms of ensuring that his caucus is fully prepared to hold the government accountable that Mr. Mason does, so why would we give Mr. Mason an increased amount for, essentially, party duties than we do for caucus duties? It just doesn't make sense to us.

As we have also noted previously, if the committee were now to reverse the precedent and insist that party leaders must be elected, parties would feel unduly obligated to choose a new leader from the existing ranks of MLAs or perhaps lose their funding.

The other aspect of the motion concerns the amount. When I say "the amount," half of the opposition caucus allowance, there is no obvious logic to the 50 per cent number. The original caucus funding amount in 1986 was \$300,000 for the NDs, \$220,000 for the Liberals, and \$140,000 for the Representative caucus, as it was called at the time. While the Official Opposition certainly has a special status, every opposition caucus has similar needs regardless of the number of members. Our motion merely sets 50 per cent as the minimum that an official party would receive; in other words, 50 per cent of what the Official Opposition receives. As a minimum number, of course, the committee could change it as they saw fit.

I'd also like to reiterate the importance of the final clause in the

motion. Recognized party status should trigger the allowance automatically, but the committee should maintain the discretion to grant that allowance to caucuses with less than four MLAs and 5 per cent of the vote. The ND Party, for example, is a well-established party in Alberta, a caucus in Alberta, and receives more than 5 per cent of the vote in virtually every election. Therefore, I would strongly recommend that the committee continue to grant them the support they currently receive.

I would also like to point out that just on the basis of plain fairness, if you look at our budget – and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo alluded to this earlier – right now the ND caucus, with two elected members, has \$98,000 more in resources than the Wildrose caucus does. Just inherently to Albertans that's unfair. I mean, it doesn't seem like a lot of money, but it's already cost us one member that we had to let go because of the decision that was made at a previous meeting. It does make a big difference. You know, we don't have a member in government and having the opportunity to have help from the Public Affairs Bureau on certain messaging things and having the ability to go to a cabinet member and ask them questions and have meetings with the deputy ministers of those cabinet ministers, et cetera, to get information. There are a lot of resources at a government member's disposal, not just the research funding.

There's no doubt that on a per-MLA basis PC members have less research funding than the NDs, Wildrose, or Liberals, but I don't think that's a very fair picture because although they do have research funding that per person is a little bit less, that's more than made up for by the mountain of resources that they have at their disposal as members in the government. If you really did an examination of it, it would be my submission that a full examination would show that per person the PC MLAs have, frankly, hundreds of thousands if not millions more in resources at their disposal to do the research that they need. But I won't get into that any further.

Again I go back to the basic premise that we should have the same amount at least as the ND caucus, which has two fewer members. I think that's a very reasonable request. To conclude, there's been no compelling justification that we're aware of for denying a caucus funding based on party leadership status. All the precedents that we've been able to find speak against it as well. In order to resolve this issue for the future, I hope the members will support our motion to ensure that all recognized parties receive equitable funding.

That's my submission, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Additional people who would like to comment?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I'm sympathetic to the comments that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has made. A question to you, Mr. Anderson, is: given the disparity – and I've done some rough estimates. The PC caucus receives about \$54,000 per member; the two independents each \$164,000; the Wildrose, \$116,000 per member; the Liberals, \$183,000; and the ND, \$280,000: obviously, some disparity. I'm wondering if you've had the opportunity to talk with the opposition caucus leaders. Or through your House leader have you had the discussion about taking the existing pool of money and doing a fair redistribution? Is that something that you've discussed?

Mr. Anderson: Can I answer that, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Proceed, please.

Mr. Anderson: Again, Mr. VanderBurg, the problem with that analysis is just simply this. I mean, I've been on both sides. I know

what's expected of a government member versus what's expected of an opposition member. The research needs of an opposition member are at least four- to fivefold what it is for the government member.

Now, what I mean by that is this: when I'm in government, yes, I have my \$54,000 for research allocated to me, but I also have at my disposal the cabinet and their staff if I have questions. They did significant research for me on several occasions for things, answered questions that would have taken hours and hours and hours of research to do. Those are resources that we don't have as an opposition.

We also don't have a Public Affairs Bureau. I'm not saying individual MLAs can instruct the Public Affairs Bureau to do one thing or the other, but one thing that is clear is that when I was a government member, we had many briefings and communication pieces that we could use out of the Public Affairs Bureau to communicate to our constituents on what the government was doing in certain areas. So it's not an apples-to-apples comparison.

With regard to opposition MLAs I would say that, yeah, it might be fair to look a little bit at making their per-member amounts a little bit more even. We have to also take into effect when we're talking about government MLAs that saying that they just get \$54,000 in resources to do all the research – I mean, technically that's true as far as the LOA is concerned, but in real life, in reality, they have far more at their disposal than that.

11:20

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, sir.

Mr. VanderBurg: Just a follow-up to that, Mr. Anderson. Maybe you missed my point. I'll restate it this way. I understand where you're coming from, and I know that if for the government caucus in members alone you times by the \$54,000 per member, the scale works for the government side. But what I'm getting at is that independent members get three times that of the funding of the PC caucus, the Liberals get three and a half times, the NDP gets five times, and you get two times. Now, have you discussed that? All the same arguments you've made for attending all the same meetings sit with the independent; it sits with the Wildrose; it sits with the NDP; it sits with the Liberals. There's such a disparity within those members, from two times to five times. You're at the low side, two times; NDP is at the high side, five times; independent is three times; and the Liberals are three and a half. Is there justification for redistribution in your mind within given that scenario?

Mr. Anderson: Well, I would say in answer to that that, you know, we definitely do need to look at it. That's my opinion. I haven't had any formal discussions with the other opposition House leaders or the independents on what that should be, but there definitely should be a larger discussion about it. Until we do have that larger discussion – I'm sure that would be quite a large discussion – I think at the very least we can take care of this obvious disparity, which is that the NDP caucus of two has more funding than a caucus of four in that regard. If we can take care of that, then I'd be more than open to having a further larger discussion. You're right. You do point out some obvious, I would say, imbalances, and we should at least talk about it and see if we can come to something that's more fair than the present.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. I agree that conversation could happen.

The Chair: Okay. I've got three speakers on it, and I was going to make a comment, but Mr. Mason, Mr. Oberle, Mr. Boutillier. Then I'll make a little comment.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, you know, I see what the hon. member is trying to do, and that is to avoid the question of the adequacy of the budget for the Wildrose Alliance and set the opposition parties to squabbling amongst themselves over the existing pie. I don't think that's a fair way, with all due respect, to approach this issue. It's my view that leaders' allowance – when we've had this debate, I have expressed my views, so I'll just summarize them – is a name that's been applied to this for the operation of some components in a caucus that are necessary. That is to say, communications and outreach and so on are normally the functions that this is intended to cover, so it's in addition to the money strictly to pay for research staff.

With respect to smaller caucuses and independents having more per MLA, it's because there are some real, very important fixed costs in operating a caucus. You know, even a small caucus like our needs a chief of staff, a communications officer, an outreach officer; we just have one of each. So that's the reason why.

I think there are 24 cabinet ministers or ministries, so Rachel and I both have 12 to keep track of, and there are real gaps in our ability to do that just because of the resources, so we tend to set priorities and concentrate on the ones that are more important at that time. You know, I don't think it's a fair approach to just break it down on a per-member cost because there are significant fixed costs for smaller caucuses, and I think we have to recognize that.

The other point that I'll make is one made by Mr. Anderson, and that is that, in fact, the access to government that government members have is very different than what we have. You know, we're sort of treated like an uninvited guest when we show up. I mean, we're the opposition; I understand that relationship. But I think maybe government members don't realize how that access enhances their ability to do their job – and that access is largely denied to opposition members – as well as participation in the government caucus, which provides opportunities for government members. Lord help us if we ever tried to show up at one of those meetings. I don't think we'd be too welcome. Those are the reasons why things are the way they are.

We support the request of the Wildrose Alliance to have a leader's allowance. I think that's only fair.

The Chair: Mr. Oberle.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple interesting points were raised here. I think the issue of access that a government member has to various resources versus what an opposition member has is a valid one already recognized in the funding model. We receive something in the neighbourhood of \$18,000 per government member in research support, up to \$96,000 for an independent member. That's a fivefold difference. I think that more than adequately addresses the difference in access. If this was about a difference in access, then maybe somebody could explain to me why all of the opposition parties wouldn't be the same. Presumably they have the same access to external resources, which would be different than what a government member has access to.

Right now the NDP have three staff per elected member; the Liberals, 2.1; the Wildrose Alliance, 1.75; and the PC caucus, .5. Again, you may make the argument that the PC caucus, the government caucus, by virtue of their access to government departments and researchers have an advantage there, but why would the advantage be so disparate in the opposition parties?

I think there is more than enough money in this pot to allow that the Wildrose Alliance receive a caucus allowance – I'll use those words for just a moment here – and that still allows the opposition parties significantly more research dollars than a government member has. We're not arguing that there should be a difference there. I use the words "caucus allowance" carefully. I'll defer to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on this, but I noticed a change in the wording in his latest communication to us, which I think is significant and was probably meant to be significant, away from a leader's allowance. If that was meant to be that way, I think I would support that concept. I would not want to see any of this money going in any way as a salary to a leader, particularly one that's not elected as a Member of our Legislative Assembly. Recognizing there are expenses to operating a caucus office, whether there's a leader there or not that's an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly, I think is probably a fairer, more justifiable way of looking at the problem.

I would suggest this doesn't have to be a huge discussion. If the opposition parties want to forge some agreement amongst themselves, fine. That would have to include independent members, and we could approve that at some later Members' Services meeting date. Otherwise, maybe this committee should decide how that should be done.

The Chair: Mr. Boutilier.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much. I'd like to think that I bring the only perspective in here having sat as a government member of caucus, as a cabinet minister, as an independent member, and now as a member of the official Wildrose. So allow me to share with members who've made comments that when they say, "I think I understand," I believe, in all due respect, you don't understand, based on the perspective I bring, having sat in those four positions: as a caucus member, a cabinet member, an independent member, and now as an opposition member of the Wildrose.

11:30

Let me start by going back to when the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talked about government influence in terms of the resources you have. Clearly, as an independent, as one member, the funding is \$164,000, with one person responsible for being a critic for 23 ministries. You ought to try that some day, and you'll see that you earn your dollars pretty well. I know Mr. Taylor would certainly agree with that, as would the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Second of all, I might add also, having sat in Government House, that I don't ever recall the Public Affairs Bureau showing up as it has at the PC caucus at Government House. It never shows up to our caucus meeting. So I have to pose to you that that is a resource that is funded, and it is not a resource that is, in actual fact, part of the PC caucus amount that is funded. Yet the Public Affairs Bureau has shown up for the PC caucus. I know what is true. The members around the table in the PC caucus know what is true. That's a resource you have that others do not have. It's a very important point not to lose sight of.

I think also that the Member for Peace River made reference earlier to the issue of professional development. The influence of government when there are conferences, be it a global conference, be it a World Petroleum Congress, that was held in Calgary, where the registration fee was \$2,000: that was funded by a government ministry. It is not funded for opposition parties.

The influence of the relationship between PC government caucus and private members is so tight that you don't even realize how tight

it is in comparison to opposition members. I'm using them as one hundred per cent examples of what's taken place. I couldn't go to the World Petroleum Congress because I didn't have \$2,000 to pay for the registration fee to go there because it's not allowable in my constituency budget, which was the previous motion that was made. Yet other members could have attended simply by the fact that the minister invites them to go and the ministry pays their registration fee. It's another example of the unlevel playing field that takes place.

I support the fact that the New Democrat leader receives \$561,000. I think it is part of our parliamentary democracy. I think that for two members they absolutely do a wonderful job, and I think the most recent polling demonstrates the wonderful job they're doing in connecting with Albertans. So I support one hundred per cent the \$561,000, Mr. Mason, that you receive.

The issue about trying to have opposition parties work it among themselves: I think we've been around this table long enough to know that that's just not how it works. So what is fair? What is fair, from the perspective that I bring, is simply this. The New Democrats have two elected members in the Assembly; they receive \$561,000. The Wildrose Alliance, an opposition, has four elected members and receives \$98,000 less. That is not fair. We are only asking, based on the motion that's been put forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, with the value that Albertans have – that is, the sense of fairness under our parliamentary democracy – that the Wildrose, with twice as many elected members, at least receive the same amount that the members from the New Democratic opposition party receive. I think it's reasonable, I think it's fair, and I ask you to listen to your inner voice on what you believe to be fair, despite what is being suggested.

Let me conclude, Mr. Chair. The Member for Peace River made reference in an earlier discussion to the issue of research dollars: use your research dollars. Well, it just so happens, Member for Peace River, that we receive \$98,000 less in research dollars than a two-member elected caucus, and we have four elected members. Okay? That is simply not fair, and Albertans will not tolerate that sense of fairness when judgment day comes.

In the meantime, I ask this committee to support the motion put forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, can I get on the list?

Ms Pastoor: Can I get on the list, too?

The Chair: I'm sorry. Who was the first one?

Mr. Anderson: It's Mr. Anderson.

The Chair: Okay. We'll come back to you. Who else hasn't spoken yet?

Ms Pastoor: I'd like to speak.

The Chair: Ms Pastoor, please.

Ms Pastoor: I could not have said it any better than the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, so I won't even try. But I would like to reiterate that I really believe that for someone who has never been in the opposition, they truly don't understand how it works. I can remember that in the old days – actually, mainly on a federal level. Nevertheless, if a minister was going somewhere, they actually took their critic with them. It was a way of making sure that everybody at the table arguing was at least arguing with the same facts.

I certainly support this motion. I have always felt that I like to

compete on a level playing field, and if I'd won knowing that somehow or another there's been an unfair advantage, it really isn't very much fun to win that one.

Thank you.

The Chair: I indicated a little while ago that I was going to make a comment, but, Mr. Anderson, you go ahead, and then I'll make my comment.

Mr. Anderson: I want to just say that I do appreciate the comments that were made by Mr. VanderBurg and Mr. Oberle. You know, I want to make sure that they both are assured that any such caucus funding will not go toward any activities of our party leader, who is, as they pointed out, an unelected member. The money will be used within the Legislature to do the research and communications that we need to do to do our job effectively and will not be used for any other purpose in that signing authority would be our deputy leader or acting leader in the House, the signing officer, et cetera, Paul Hinman. I do want to say that that is absolutely where we're at, too. Yes, that language was changed, but it was more for clarification. It was never the intent of the Wildrose that this money was going to be used for a salary for the leader to go around and do her business. That was never the intent. So there's that.

I also want to thank the other opposition members for their comments. They were very reasonable and measured, and what I hope is, you know, that there's a sense of fairness that I think is kind of above politics. I think it's pretty clear just from the comments from both the government and the other side that people understand that what is going on right now is unfair with regard to us having unequal funding.

I do want to give a couple of brief examples just so that members on the government side understand. I don't blame them for not having the first-hand experience because it is a glass of cold water in the face when you get into opposition after being in government. Examples of these things would be the CPC briefings that you get for different pieces of legislation from the department. We don't have those. We have to make those from scratch, and they're not as detailed because we don't have all of the access to information that the cabinet policy chairs do. So there's one example.

The other big one is just the department presentations that you get at the caucus meetings, you know, from various different departments. Obviously, in my two years in government we had tons of opportunity in caucus meetings to listen to those PowerPoints and to those presentations as they came in. Those were very helpful in understanding the legislation and so forth. I've also had many speeches on certain bills given to me, not from my researcher, and questions as well for question period that came out of the different ministries' communications staff. So there are all those.

I'm not saying those things, you know, shouldn't be done. I'm just saying that it gives you some perspective of the amount of resources that the government and private members have. Then, of course, there's the issue that we have to actually speak to most of these bills in the House. I'm critic for, I think, five or six different portfolios, and it really is an amazing challenge to try to do all that. It takes a lot of research. Even this extra money isn't going to give us all the research that we really should be doing on these things, but it'll at least be an improvement, and it at least will level the playing field a little bit. I hope that the committee doesn't expect us, you know, as opposition to fight over it and say, "Okay. Now, the independents, Liberals all get the exact same" and come to an agreement, because we know that's very difficult. That would mean huge layoffs unless we were talking about increasing the budget. It would mean layoffs for several of the independents, maybe some of

the New Dems, et cetera. I would just hope that the government members – you're the majority on this committee. I think if we can start here with this one little motion to get things a little bit more even, then I'd be very open to hearing the ideas from the government, the committee, and from the opposition on what to do going forward. If we could just take this one motion at a time here and try to get this very clear on fairness of the system as it currently stands, I think that would be a good step in the right direction.

11:40

The Chair: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want maybe a little clarity, and then I'll make a comment. I don't recall that we actually have a motion on the floor as yet.

The Chair: No. We do have a motion.

Mr. Rogers: Oh. We have a motion?

The Chair: Yes, we do. The motion is in your binder. It comes out of the minutes, and I read it in right at the beginning.

Mr. Rogers: Okay. That is the motion to add the additional caucus allowance to the Wildrose Alliance. I missed something, and I apologize for that.

My comments, Mr. Chairman. I mean, I suspect there will be a majority opinion one way or the other, but the fact that we have a situation now that has partly come about because of the history – okay. I do have a copy of the motion here, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: It's in your binder.

Mr. Rogers: Yes. It talks about discretion.

The point I want to make is that because of history, obviously, we have certain funding envelopes as they exist today. Then we've had some changes in the composition of various caucuses, and here we are with a request for additional funding. We have a budget that we've already passed, with an attempt to hold the line as we have been doing over the last couple of years.

The suggestion has been raised or part of the discussion by my hon. colleague from Whitecourt-Ste. Anne around the motion was that we look at something that equalizes or brings more equity to the research funding for the various caucuses. I didn't hear too much excitement for that from the opposition members, certainly, that are around the table and the folks online. So I'm just wondering, Mr. Chairman, if there is some way going forward, whether we vote on this motion or not or we defer it, that we would try to find some way of getting some more equity. Because wherever our political stripes are, I think it's very obvious that we certainly don't have equity in terms of the funding allocated on a per-member basis, whether there's some way that we could find that in the near term or something in the future. I guess that's sort of what I'm hoping might transpire because I have a sense of where the divisions lie in terms of voting on one of these motions or both of them or the suggestions as they are.

The Chair: Are there others who want to participate?

There are a few comments, but I don't know if I should make the comments now or wait till you deal with the motion. This is, from my perspective, something that we should attempt to try and resolve. When we had our meeting on September 28, there was a motion put forward by Mr. Anderson that basically talked about \$233,249. That

motion was defeated. Then there was another motion, the motion that we're talking about here right now, which is basically the same thing. It's money. It's \$233,249, as I understand. So that was kept.

It was my hope that, in fact, from the September 28 meeting to now there would have been some discussion among the various players, the various caucuses with respect to this. I think most people would have recognized on September 28 that there was going to be a hold-the-line budget. We talked about that before. That was basically the way the budget came in.

If I understand this completely – and anybody can correct me if they want to at any time – we're talking, basically, about \$233,249 in general. Is that what everybody agrees?

Mr. VanderBurg: I don't.

The Chair: You don't. Well, what number are we talking about?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I thought I heard the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo say that the minimum that he would expect would be to be brought up to the same level of funding that the NDs have.

That was, I think you said, Mr. Boutilier, \$98,000?

Mr. Boutilier: That's the difference right now.

Mr. VanderBurg: That's the difference that he was looking for.

The Chair: Ninety-eight thousand dollars. Mr. Anderson, what are we talking about? I don't understand this. Just let me clarify this for a second. Much of this discussion has to do with the leader's office allowance for the NDs. That's the only distinctive difference from anybody else. It's \$233,249.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I want to make a point of order. I mean, the discussion is getting off track from the motion which is before us. You know, we're not the only caucus that receives a leader's allowance. The Liberals also receive a leader's allowance.

The Chair: I was trying to get clarification, Mr. Mason, but if it's a point of order, I'm backing right off.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

The Chair: Let's go to the motion. We have the motion on the floor.

Mr. Anderson: I'd like to clarify your point, Mr. Speaker, because I think it was a good one and an honest question.

The Chair: Well, I can't be an independent speaker if I've got one member in the House calling me on a point of order and another member saying he likes what I'm saying and nobody knows what I'm talking about.

Mr. Anderson: Well, let me just clarify. You're right, Mr. Speaker. The motion clearly – well, it says it right here – for the Members' Services Committee to provide in their estimates for an "opposition caucus allowance equalling at least one-half of Official Opposition caucus funding for any caucus constituting a recognized . . . party," like the Wildrose. Okay?

The Chair: Am I correct in assuming that that's \$233,249?

Mr. Anderson: Yes. But let me clarify that. It is, but given the comments around the table that I've heard today, I would be more than happy to withdraw the motion and put another one forward, a simpler one that just says that our funding be brought to the same level as the NDP, which is much less than \$233,000; it's \$98,000. I'd be more than happy to do that. Then we can start this conversation at a different time in the future, whenever we decide as a committee. If it'll bring closure to this issue and at least we can take care of this one piece of unfairness, I'd be willing, like I say, to withdraw this motion for a larger discussion some time in the future and just go with having the same as whatever the NDP has.

Mr. Rogers: Clarification, please.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Part of the reason I was having trouble referring to the motion, Mr. Chairman, is that it talks about "caucus allowance equalling at least one-half of Official Opposition caucus." Now, if I take the number under the budget estimates here of \$1.469 million, are we talking about \$700,000, or are we talking \$233,000? I mean, I could vote this motion down because I don't even know what I'm voting for.

Mr. Anderson: I think we discussed it at the previous meeting, Mr. Rogers, but I'll review again. I mean, what it's basically saying is that obviously there's a per-member amount for office staff or administrative support. It's \$67,000 per member, if I'm not mistaken, or something like that. Anyway, we're not asking for that part to be changed. The part we're asking to have changed is what's called the leader's office allowance, which we call a caucus allowance in this motion. We're saying that that should be the same as the NDP, which is one-half of what the Official Opposition gets for a leader's office allowance. That's what this motion says. What I'm saying is that given we've passed the budget and we're trying to hold the line and so forth, if an increase of \$233,000 is too much for the committee – and, you know, I understand where they might be coming from on that – I'd be more than happy to put forth another motion, that the Wildrose be given the exact same amount for their caucus as the NDP receives. So \$561,000 it is. If that would be a compromise after the discussion around this table, I'd be more than happy to withdraw the current motion and put that new motion in.

The Chair: Does everybody understand that?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, if that's in order, that we in fact have a new motion on the floor, I need absolute surety here that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is asking that their total budget be increased by approximately \$98,000, whatever it is.

The Chair: It is \$98,435.

Mr. Oberle: I maintain my position that there is a conversation to be had regarding how the opposition research budgets are arrived at. I think that is definitely a conversation that should be had, maybe even a larger conversation than that: exactly when, under what circumstances, and how much the caucus allowances should be. I'd prefer to defer all of that to a later conversation.

In support of this current motion, however, I would still suggest

that we should do that on a zero base, as in keeping our overall budget zero base and reallocating somehow in order to achieve this \$98,000 adjustment. I would suggest that maybe we should consider doing that simply by adjusting the research dollars or the caucus allowance for all members on an equal basis, not recognizing government or opposition members. That would amount to something between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per member across the board, and I'd be prepared to support that.

11:50

The Chair: Well, we have no motions here right now, so we have to focus on something.

Mr. Anderson, are you prepared to withdraw the motion you have that was moved at the beginning of this discussion?

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: Everybody agree?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: So now do you want to put forward another motion?

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: Please put it forward.

Mr. Anderson: Under the document here, I would make a motion that the Wildrose Alliance opposition services budget be increased to \$561,000 and – what did you say?

The Chair: Well, \$561,000. We round off to the thousand, if that's okay.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that would be the motion. I would ask the Member for Peace River and the chair if instead of taking it away from everyone else's research dollars equally, we would be open, under the special funding requirements for the federal building redevelopment project, to finding the money in that line item since it's such an uncertainty at this point.

The Chair: No, because I'd have to go through the priorities in terms of the last one. We have to do certain things.

Well, first of all, let's deal with the motion to see where we go with it. The motion is that

the Wildrose Alliance overall caucus envelope be increased from \$463,000 to \$561,000.

That's the motion, right?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Who wants to speak to it? Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that we've always supported a more equitable funding for the Wildrose Alliance, but I really am concerned about some of the direction of some of the comments that have been made, that the per-MLA calculation ignores the formulas that are actually in place here. There are, in fact, per-MLA formulas as part of caucus funding, and in that case the Wildrose has an increase over what the NDP receives because it's per person.

The Chair: I'm going to interject on a point of order, okay? I'm going to interject on a point of order, Mr. Mason. We have a

motion, and the motion is a very simple one: to increase the Wildrose Alliance opposition budget. How is it going to bother you? How is it going to affect you?

Mr. Mason: I hope it won't, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Well, the motion doesn't say anything about you.

Mr. Mason: I was in anticipation of that, which I've heard from some of the members.

The Chair: Okay. Anticipation. Well, we'll see what happens.

Mr. Mason: I guess I was trying to get at that. But if people do want to find this money within the budget, the question I really had is: what proportion of the total LAO budget actually goes to caucus funding as opposed to the full budget amount?

The Chair: Well, the government caucus gets \$3.6 million; the Official Opposition budget is \$1,469,000; the Wildrose budget right now is proposed at \$463,000; the ND budget is \$561,000; the two independents each have \$164,000. So if you totalled all of that up, you'd get about 15 or 18 per cent.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I guess the point that I want to make is that if we have to find this additional \$98,000, it might be a little fairer and more equitable to not take it away from opposition funding but to find the savings in the global budget for the LAO. That's the point I wanted to make.

The Chair: The poor library gets it again, right?

Mr. Mason: Well, the poor NDP caucus.

The Chair: Oh. Okay. On a point of order, how much money again: \$561,000 for two members?

Mr. Mason: Yeah.

The Chair: Anyway, we have a motion. Yes, Mr. VanderBurg. We're on the motion.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, I support the motion from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere given that we could fund it out of our caucuses. What it would mean is that Dave Taylor and Raj Sherman would give up \$1,150 each, the NDs would give up \$2,300, and the Wildrose would give up \$4,400 to get \$98,000 – sign me on – and the PC caucus is reduced by 70-some thousand dollars.

The Chair: Well, that's not the motion, though.

Mr. VanderBurg: No. But I could support it if it could come out of existing funding, given that . . .

The Chair: It's not in the motion.

Mr. VanderBurg: Right.

The Chair: You have to have an amendment to the motion. Are you listening to this, Mr. Anderson?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. So far your motion just basically says: move it to \$561,000.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do, then, to make this easier for everybody, is to table this motion. I am going to speak with my fellow opposition House leaders and the independents to see what we can arrive at, but if the government members – as Mr. Oberle and Mr. VanderBurg have pointed out, if that's the direction that they're willing to agree to, then I would like to definitely talk this over with my fellow House leaders and the independents before moving forward with it.

Ms Pastoor: Could I speak?

The Chair: Yes. There is a motion on the table that is nondebtable, but go on.

Ms Pastoor: Sorry. Having money rearranged within only the opposition is not what I consider to be fair.

The Chair: I haven't heard anybody say that.

Ms Pastoor: Well, Mr. Oberle was kind of hinting at that.

The Chair: But Mr. VanderBurg just talked about the government putting in \$78,000 or something.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. I apologize. I missed that.

The Chair: Well, Mr. Anderson, are you prepared to go with a tabled motion on this?

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Listen. In terms of the budgeting process for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta you agreed this morning to the budget. I have to have the documentation in for tabling in the Legislature at an unknown date in February.

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: I'm quite impressed with the movement that has been made this morning with respect to this. I congratulate all the members. You've approved the budget. If you want to, we can put this decision pending, and we can hold another Members' Services meeting in the first week of February, which would still give us enough time to have the documentation in for presentation to the Legislative Assembly. If it's a matter of reshuffling dollars, we can do that internally, so we don't need to have another motion in terms of the budget. If you can't come up with an agreement, then we would have to find \$98,000 over and above what we have, or I and the Clerk would have to find it internally.

Let's go on three streams. If you want to table it, table it, and then we'll have another meeting in the first week of February. In the meantime, Mr. Anderson, you talk to your colleagues, including the government caucus, the opposition caucus, and the independents, to see if you can find the 98,000 bucks among yourselves. The Clerk and I will do our own private investigation to see if we can find \$98,000 in the event that you fail, but we would not accept your failure to be a good thing.

Mr. Anderson: I heard you.

The Chair: You've got that?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah.

The Chair: Can you live with that?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah.

The Chair: Can you be happy about that?

Mr. Anderson: Overjoyed.

The Chair: All right, then.

So who's unhappy about this?

Okay. Let's try and sort this all out. This matter is tabled. We come back to it in February. In the meantime, there's an understanding about where we want to go. Okay?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: So then we have one other item. My God, you mean we're going to maybe be able to walk out of this meeting and say this was a good meeting? Maybe. Okay. We're not finished yet.

Okay. Number 5 – we've done (a); we've done (d) – is Motion 501. Now, Motion 501 – and Mr. Anderson, you said something as well. Let me just go back to what we had in the meeting of September 28, 2010, because I want to make this very, very clear before I get inundated with a whole series of things. This motion was passed in the Assembly in the province of Alberta. This motion said that the Legislature call on the government of Alberta to undertake a review.

12:00

This is the Legislative Assembly, and this is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. We are not the government of Alberta. The government of Alberta is, essentially, the cabinet.

My understanding from previous comments made in this particular meeting by Mr. Oberle is that some discussion was held between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition, and they were holding discussions. Then somebody asked Mr. Campbell: well, does that mean other people can provide some names as well? I do believe that's where Mr. Anderson got that information. It was very clear. I have received no indication from anyone in the government that we are to be looking at this matter. This is not at this point in time a matter of the Members' Services Committee.

I'm a little ambivalent about this. I indicated before that we always do our assessments. We always get everything up to date in terms of comparatives across the country, but we've done nothing further. I'm just pending, awaiting somebody to tell me that this is what we should be doing. Then I'll put it together. That's where we're at.

Ms Pastoor: Could I jump in?

The Chair: Yeah. Absolutely.

Mr. Anderson, in the letter you sent the other day, you said that you heard about this in the media. Well, okay. Then I went looking after that, and I read it in the media, too. That's where I'm at.

Mr. Anderson: You and me both, Mr. Chair. This is the first we'd heard of it. We heard it meant, obviously, that the motion had passed, but we hadn't heard of it either. Then we got word through the media that the government members were saying that they were

waiting for the Wildrose and Liberals to put forth their proposals on what the panel should look like, so we were just responding to that. We're in the dark with you on that one.

The Chair: Okay. Well, let's try and find some light in the future, then.

Anybody want to make any comments further on this?

Ms Pastoor: Yes, please.

The Chair: Yes. Sorry. Please. Absolutely, Bridget.

Ms Pastoor: That was going to be my first question because I believe that the answer that you gave really does make anything that we discuss further on actually a moot question. The Premier agreed in question period that the government would begin the work toward following the advice of the Assembly, which, of course, was Motion 501. Clearly, it's still on the government's side of the court. I think the intent of the motion is that it should be an independent commission that looks at it. We should not be setting our own salaries, which, of course, would then be setting our own salaries if it came to Members' Services. As far as I'm concerned, any further conversation is moot at this point.

The Chair: Okay. Please remember, under the Legislative Assembly Act of Alberta – then you're going to have to make amendments to the Legislative Assembly Act because we are charged with making those decisions, Ms Pastoor, and have been charged for three decades.

Ms Pastoor: Yeah. I understand that, and that's what I would hope that maybe an independent might come up with.

The Chair: They cannot make motions for us. We can run, but we can't hide.

Ms Pastoor: No.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mason: Did you have me as well, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Mason. How could I have ignored that?

Mr. Mason: I'm not sure.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I share your view of this. People will remember that about three meetings ago I put forward a motion that the committee establish an independent committee to look at this, and that was defeated. Shortly after, in the Legislative Assembly the Liberal opposition brought forward a motion that the government should lead this. That was then passed by the Legislative Assembly. That was a motion to the government. Then I had understood the Premier to indicate that he would ensure

that this actually took place and that there was actually a meeting between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier on the matter. The Premier also indicated that he would be talking to other leaders, but we never heard anything.

I just want to put on the record that the motion from the Legislative Assembly was that the government should lead this. If the government refers it to the committee, then I think we can take it up again, and I think we should. I think it's the appropriate venue to do that.

The Chair: Okay. Fair game.

You happy with that? I'm happy, too.

All right. I indicated that perhaps the opening, then, for the next meeting would be in the first week of February. Would that be fine? Is Wednesday a good time in the first week of February? Could you put that in your Day-timers, then, and then we'll confirm everything?

Now, before we leave, we have some revised Members' Services Committee orders. These have been circulated. They're all pretty much the same. In essence, they basically say that the Executive Council salaries order is repealed; that is, that no minister can get a salary increase April 1. It also says that no MLA can get a salary increase April 1, and then the other one is that nobody else gets an increase April 1. That's what we agreed to.

We could actually have one motion to deal with all three, or we could have three subsequent ones.

Mr. Mason: Can we split them, please?

The Chair: Absolutely. Executive Council Salaries Order RMSC 1992, c. E-2. All those hon. members in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. That one's carried.

Members' Allowances Order RMSC 1992, c. M-1. Again, that's no adjustments for MLAs. All those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Okay. It's carried.

The third one, the members' committee allowances order, I believe, then deals with everybody else. Parliamentary Counsel, is that correct?

Mr. Reynolds: That deals with members' time on committees.

The Chair: Oh, this is members' time on committees.

All those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Okay. So that freezes everything.

The date of the next meeting is the first Wednesday in February.

Anybody have anything further they want to add? Well, to all of you, have a wonderful, wonderful December, have a wonderful, wonderful Christmas, a very wonderful New Year, get some rest, and don't ever catch a cold in December.

A motion to adjourn? So moved. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 12:07 p.m.]

