



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Thursday, February 7, 2013
9:04 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Chair
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC), Deputy Chair

Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Dorward, David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL)
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W)

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9:04 a.m.

Thursday, February 7, 2013

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I have 9:04 on my clock, and I'd like to get started. Time is short, the day is short, and we have lots of business to transact, so let me call this meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. on Thursday, February 7.

Just one quick note under housekeeping. I have now added four more constituency visits – Olds-Didsbury, Sundre, Red Deer, and Innisfail – which we accomplished over the last few days, and I have two or three more scheduled for next week. The Speaker's outreach visits to constituency offices are going very well, and we're gaining lots of insight and information into what I call the local circumstances. Other than that, I have nothing else under housekeeping. Unless anyone else does, we'll move on to item 2. Thank you. I don't see any others.

You should have in front of you a revised agenda that was sent out yesterday as soon as we were able to put together revisions as requested by certain members. With that in mind, I would ask for someone to give me a motion to approve the agenda as revised. Mr. Goudreau, followed by Mr. Quest. Thank you. On the motion by Mr. Goudreau to approve the revised agenda as circulated, seconded by Mr. Quest, those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Those opposed, please no. Thank you.

We'll go around the room shortly and see who all is present. I think we have at least one member joining us by teleconference, so let's start there.

Mrs. Forsyth, are you in?

Mrs. Forsyth: I am. Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms Smith: Danielle Smith, Highwood.

Mr. Dorward: David Dorward, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Goudreau: Hector Goudreau, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mrs. Jablonski: Good morning. Mary Anne Jablonski, Red Deer-North.

Mr. Quest: Good morning. Dave Quest, Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Young: Steve Young, MLA, Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

The Chair: Thank you. The only person we're just waiting to hear from is probably Mr. Mason. Is anyone here able to indicate if he's on his way, or does he intend to join us by teleconference? We don't know, but we understand that he's supposed to be here, though. I think he indicated that he would be joining us.

That being said, we'll move on. We have minutes of the December 19 meeting. Does anyone wish to make a motion to approve the minutes of December 19 as circulated? We have Ms Calahasen. I don't know if there is anything that needs querying. Is there any discussion on the motion to approve the December 19 MSC meeting minutes? Hearing none, seeing none, let me call the question, then. Those in favour of approving the minutes of the December 19 meeting of the Members' Services Committee, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That's carried unanimously. Thank you.

We're going to go on to old business. Before we do, I just want to welcome everyone back. I thought we had a number of very

productive meetings last term, and I'm looking forward to more of the same coming up. There are a couple of carry-over items, however, that we want to start today's meeting with. You may recall that as part of your December 19 committee meeting minutes that we just approved, Dr. Sherman was asked to read into the record his motions just so that we could study them and have them on the floor, so to speak. Today we'll begin with Dr. Sherman again, under item 4(a). I think for purposes of the record, Dr. Sherman, we would just ask you to now officially read these into the record, and we'll proceed with the discussion on them, starting with 4(a).

Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Be it resolved that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services adopt the following policy on disclosure of constituency office and caucus expenditures:

- (a) That the document entitled Budget vs. Expenditure Report prepared by the Legislative Assembly Office, LAO, for caucuses and constituency offices be posted quarterly on the Legislative Assembly's publicly available website without any identifying personal information.
- (b) Information posted concerning staffing expenses, manpower, in the Budget vs. Expenditure Report prepared by the LAO would only contain aggregate amounts for caucuses and constituency offices and would only be posted if the amounts were for more than two employees.
- (c) The information disclosed under this policy would be for expenditures commencing January 1, 2013, and must occur no later than April 30, 2013, and 30 days after the end of each following quarter of the fiscal year.
- (d) This policy may be referred to as Members' Services Committee Policy on the Disclosure of Caucus and Constituency Office Expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, this is just following on the heels of the work that we did prior to Christmas, when we posted MLA expense disclosures. I believe that's something that we all agree with, openness and accountability. This will make us one of the most open Legislative Assembly offices in the country. With your leadership I would ask that all members from all political parties support this. That way, the public will know where every dollar is being spent and how it's being spent. Especially in light of the fiscal situation recently with budgeting, I ask for everybody's unanimous support.

Thank you.

9:10

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Did you need that seconded?

The Chair: No. We don't typically require seconds here. Carry on, Ms Smith.

Ms Smith: Thank you. I'm supportive of this motion. I've been posting our Highwood constituency expenses and our LAO expenses as well, our legislative caucus expenses. The concern that we had was the issue of how you maintain the privacy of salaries in offices where you have single employees. What I do like about the proposal that's been put forward is that it does allow for that level of privacy for employees. I don't see any concerns that our caucus would have with this, so I'm happy to support it.

The Chair: Thank you. I would just note as we canvass for other speakers that we do have an expense disclosure item that the LAO is already working on, which will have an effective date of April

1. I don't know yet how this all ties in because I haven't seen the draft of it, as it were, but they're working on it.

Mr. Young: To your point, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly interested in how that implementation of the disclosures is going to happen. With all due respect, I think this falls well short of the privacy that we're looking for and from the fact that there is a fixed amount that is being used by each of the caucuses to run their caucus business. I think that the motion falls short, so I'll just leave it at that.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers to motion 4(a) as it's listed on our agenda? Mr. Goudreau.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just concerned about what may happen. I was able to negotiate some fairly reasonable rents with people in my constituency for both offices, and by making that public, I can see a tremendous amount of pressure on me to change my rents to move forward or to have rents very similar to the average in the province of Alberta. By disclosing all of these things, I can see some negative sides as well as, you know, some potential gains.

The Chair: We heard some of those arguments last year, and I see here that there is a qualifier with respect to item 4(a), sub (b), which discusses aggregate amounts; for example, where more than two employees are listed. Other issues, as I recall, pertained to certain offices not wanting to make their rents public for the protection of the landlord, who would then be in a compromising position potentially. These are items that I only flag because the LAO is working on them now to see what they might do to accommodate the thrust of those particular concepts to ensure that we're not violating anybody's privacy or confidence or whatever.

Ms Smith: Can I just seek some clarity? I have not gone through the blues the way that the former MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Hugh MacDonald, used to do. I know he probably knew every single person who has ever had a cheque written to them by the government. But it does occur to me that – I don't know the answer to this question – in the case of Mr. Goudreau's point, wouldn't his landlord be listed in the blues with the amount that they receive from government each year as a result of the disclosure that we would have to do? I'm just wondering if this issue of privacy has actually already been dealt with as a requirement of public disclosure of expenses that we would actually have to do.

The Chair: It's a valid question. Does anybody have an answer off the top of their head? If not, can we look into it, then?

Jacquie, did you want to just introduce yourself, please?

Ms Breault: Hi. Jacqueline Breault, manager of corporate services with the LAO. Are you referring to the information that's in the blue book that Treasury Board and Finance publishes?

Ms Smith: Yes.

Ms Breault: As the LAO has its own financial system independent of government, the payee information is not transferred to government, so that level of detail is not included in that particular document.

Ms Smith: Would that also be the case, then, for rental agreements that are signed with different landlords?

Ms Breault: Any vendor, whether it was a landlord or for other goods and services, would be treated the same.

Ms Smith: There's no requirement to disclose? Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Are there any other speakers? If not, are you ready for the question? The question has been called. Those in favour of Dr. Sherman's motion listed as item 4(a)?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. Could I get a recorded vote on this one?

The Chair: After we're done, sure. Those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. I believe the noes have it, but a recorded vote has been requested. Would those who are in favour of the motion please indicate their names at this time? Let's start with Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Yes. Raj Sherman.

Ms Smith: Danielle Smith.

The Chair: Any others in favour?

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth.

The Chair: We have three. Any others? So we have three recorded votes in favour of the motion.

Those opposed to the motion, please enunciate your names, starting with Ms Calahasen.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen.

Mr. Young: Steve Young.

Mr. Quest: Dave Quest.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mary Anne Jablonski.

Mr. Goudreau: Hector Goudreau.

Mr. Dorward: David Dorward.

The Chair: Thank you. I count six against the motion, three for, so that motion accordingly is defeated.

Let us proceed with item 4(b), then. Do we have this one for circulation as well? Dr. Sherman, if you wouldn't mind proceeding with your item 4(b), we'll circulate the motion again for those who may not have it handy.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Be it resolved that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services recommend to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta that the government introduce legislation to establish an independent process to review, determine, and implement remuneration for the Members of the Legislative Assembly and that the committee recommend that Bill 214, Members of the Legislative Assembly Remuneration Review Commission Act, introduced by former member Mrs. Abdurahman in the Assembly on February 15, 1994, be a framework for that legislation.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we recently tabled a report. The Liberal caucus had a minority report that went to the Legislative Assembly before Christmas, when we discussed the MLA compensation. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, Mrs. Jablonski, raised the point that from Justice Major's report, for us to have two to three judges review the compensation, we would actually have to change the legislation. So our report to the Legislative Assembly I feel was incomplete in that, moving forward, the same issues that we've dealt with will again arise, where we are setting up our own pay. As you know, I've always

been opposed to setting our pay, especially to increasing our pay, because I feel it's a conflict of interest. Secondly, I feel that we have much more important work to do in the Legislative Assembly on behalf of the people of Alberta versus debating our pay.

Now, the bill that was introduced by Mrs. Abdurahman in 1994: as you can see, this has been an issue for a few decades now. It was a bill that recommended that a justice be involved and that there be members of the public that work with the justice from various groups and that that group of people report to you, Mr. Speaker. So it takes it out of the hands of elected officials, and we can carry on with business that's more important.

I would ask all members of the government caucus – I recognize you have the majority of the vote – to please seriously consider this. You know, in the last election MLA compensation became a major election issue when, really, we need to be debating the issues of the people of this province, not only budgets but how we're going to educate our children, how we're going to care for the elderly and sick, how we're going to deal with the environmental issues. Public policy has become the victim because MLA compensation, while it is only such a small percentage of expenditures, has become a major public discourse.

Based on that, I would ask all members of the government: please, let's put this behind us, and let's move forward. Let's focus on the problems of the people of this great province. I ask you to support this motion.

Thank you.

Ms Smith: I'm also supportive of this motion. I think it's been put forward in a way that gives the government maximum latitude. It doesn't say to implement Bill 214 but to use it as a framework. I think the government has the opportunity to look at that bill and take the essence of it, as Dr. Sherman has described, which is: sure, have a justice, as Ms Redford did in the previous review of compensation, but also have members of the public. That's something that has been recommended by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. It's something we've recommended as well. I think it's a way to make sure that everyday voters, average taxpayers, have input into what their MLAs are being paid.

If this does come forward in the Legislature, I would look forward to debating it. I don't think it needs to be too prescriptive at this stage other than keeping those high-level principles. I would also urge the government to support it and put it on the legislative agenda for the spring or fall session.

9:20

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: Dr. Sherman, could you go through the details of Bill 214 for the record?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this is a motion to use that as a framework. It's not a recommendation that that bill be implemented word for word as is. It's a framework upon which we would improve that bill together after debating it. It's not for the purpose of implementing it as is.

Mr. Dorward: I understand that. Do you understand the motion? What is the context of the motion? We're being asked to vote on taking the context of 214 and asking the Assembly to apply it. I just need to have you tell me what the context of 214 is. I mean, I'm seeking something slightly more than just a general comment that we should lean on something. I don't recall. I think it may have been circulated in the fall, but I don't have it right now. Can you just tell us what 214 said?

Dr. Sherman: The real context is that MLA remuneration should be independently set and that there be an independent committee that reviews MLA pay and that that committee, led by a justice and composed of the citizens of this province, report to the Speaker of the House. Now, in order for our compensation to be independently set moving forward, we must change the legislation. We ask that Bill 214 be used as a framework for discussion. We put into legislation the final solution for setting our pay so that we never have to discuss setting our pay ever again.

Mr. Dorward: One quick supplemental: is the essence of the difference between 214 and the way it is right now only that there are members of the public with justices, as you just mentioned, that only the members of the public are the difference?

Dr. Sherman: The essence of the bill is that a justice report to the Speaker and that there be members of the public from various groups who set our pay, just as the Legislative Assembly through the budgeting process and the government sets the pay of the public, and that the public have a say in setting the pay of MLAs.

The Chair: I've been provided with a copy of 214 by our secretary of the committee, Allison Quast. I'm just going to highlight a couple of points here, and, Dr. Sherman, please feel free. I don't think we want to read the whole thing. Nonetheless, this was presented in 1994 as Bill 214 during the Second Session of the 23rd Legislature by Mrs. Abdurahman.

The essence of it says that a commission would be established, that a chairperson would be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and that the chair would be a judge of the Court of Appeal, the Court of Queen's Bench, or the Provincial Court or that it would be a retired judge of any of those courts or of the former district courts, and then five persons would be appointed by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in consultation with the President of Executive Council and the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

(3) Notwithstanding subsection 2, no person shall be appointed to the Commission who is an employee within the meaning of the Public Service Act and is presently or has within the last five years been a member of the Legislative Assembly.

(4) Notwithstanding subsection (2) . . .

which I just referred to earlier,

. . . the composition of the Commission shall reflect

- (a) the interests of the following groups,
 - the professions,
 - small business,
 - labour,
 - oil, gas and petrochemical industry,
 - the general public, and
- (b) the geographical composition of the province including,
 - Calgary and Edmonton,
 - rural areas, and
 - the southern, central and northern regions.

Bill 214 goes on to clarify a role of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, who would sit as a nonvoting member of the commission, and it also indicates further on that the commission shall review and prepare a report in which are established the rates of indemnity allowance, the expense allowance, the rates of deduction made from the indemnity allowance, the expense allowance pursuant to section 40, and temporary residence in Edmonton and so on. So there's quite a bit more there with respect to the details.

Finally, it says:

- (2) The first Commission appointed under this Act shall meet within fifteen days of its appointment and shall deliver its report

to the Speaker no later than 60 days of its first meeting,

(3) A new Commission shall be appointed for each new Legislature.

I think that's the gist and the thrust of the motion. I'm sure everybody understands that. I don't know, Dr. Sherman, if you wanted to add anything to that, but that's basically it. I hope that maybe helps clarify, in a nutshell, where we're at.

Mr. Quest: Well, just a comment and then a question for the member. I will not be supporting the motion. I think that all of us around this table would probably happily abdicate the responsibility of doing this because – you're right – it would be much easier if somebody else would do it. My question is: what do we do in a case where we have an independent report? Frankly, it was the opinion of this group that it was too rich, so we had to deal with it, scale back or eliminate the pension portion of it and so on. My concern is that if it is done completely independently, where do you see us dealing with that? What happens when that independent group comes out with something that we consider and that Albertans would consider to be excessive?

Dr. Sherman: Well, thank you for that question. This is why you need average Albertans, representatives of the average Albertan on there for the labour groups and a cross-section of society, not just CEOs and not just three judges. I guess my question to the member is: why do you insist on setting your own pay? Don't you see that as a conflict of interest? We are leaders, and our job is to lead by example. What message do we send to the public? I guess that's my question to the hon. member. Why do you insist on setting your own pay?

Mr. Quest: Well, again, just to respond, as I said, I think that would be everybody around this table's first choice, but I think you do run that risk, if you like, and we did just have that experience. I think we would be assuming a great deal. If you picked A, B, and C, who do you pick? Who's going to be on it? What are they going to do, and what do you do if they come back with something, you know, that we feel is unpalatable for Albertans? To the member: like I say, I don't like doing this either, but this is the task that we have.

Dr. Sherman: To the hon. member: this is why it's about true independence. With the current process the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has, you know, put his stuff into the muck a couple of times here. This is exactly the reason. It's true independence. While the MLA compensation is only an extraordinarily small amount of the budget, it's the fact that we are setting it. It's the principle, that we are in a conflict of interest setting our pay. We need to depoliticize MLA pay. We cannot be setting MLA pay based on what the polling shows and what the public perceives. If the pay is a little bit extra or if the pay is a lot less, it's independently set.

The Chair: Okay. Let me move on.

Ms Smith: I would just say that if the government members think that it's more palatable, they could perhaps amend it to eliminate the last part of it, making reference to Bill 214. I think Dr. Sherman's motion is intended to give the government the latitude to use it as a framework and essentially put in whatever protections they think are going to work in the interests of what they believe Albertans want to see.

I think the process that we have right now is where from time to time, if there's a media story that gets hot enough, the Premier decides to call an independent commission, and it's ad hoc, and

there are no parameters around who's on that committee. Then a report comes here, and we go through this agonizing process of what we approve and what we don't approve. I think that's what the current process is, and I don't think that that's working for the government, I don't think it's working for Albertans, and it's not working for those of us on the opposition side.

I think what the Justice Major report suggested about having a regular review was something that we determined in this committee could not be done without legislation. I think the reason Mrs. Jablonski withdrew her motion is that we can't direct through this committee for a judge to do anything. If the government wants to establish an ongoing, regular process every 10 years or whatever to review, I think that this motion would give them the full latitude to do that. It would give some certainty to members who are running for political office. It would depoliticize it.

Quite frankly, they have the majority in the Legislature. They can draft whatever legislation they want. I think it's quite clear that this is just a recommendation that we have some kind of legislated process so that we can get away from the ad hocism that we've seen around the establishment of MLA pay.

9:30

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to more clearly understand the second part of the motion that you've put forward, Dr. Sherman. You've mentioned that we should use Bill 214, that was introduced by a member in 1994, as a framework for this legislation. I just want to know a little bit more about 214. You said it was introduced. I'd like to know: was it debated in the Legislature? Was it approved? If it was not approved, then my question is: I'm not sure that it would be proper for members – how many years later? – almost 20 years later to overrule what may have happened in the Legislature. I need to understand that.

Dr. Sherman: Well, to the hon. member, if this was passed in the Legislature and if it was implemented in the Legislature, we would not be having this discussion today.

Mrs. Jablonski: Not necessarily, Dr. Sherman. Not all private members' bills that pass in the Legislature get implemented.

Dr. Sherman: Exactly. If it was passed and if the government chose to proclaim it, we would not have this discussion today.

Mrs. Jablonski: Did it pass?

Dr. Sherman: Did it pass? It wasn't passed at that time by the Conservative government, that you were a member of.

In fact, the hon. Speaker was a member of the Liberal caucus at that time, I believe. I believe he probably supported it at that time. Now that the hon. Speaker is charged with this responsibility, what I can say is that it's probably a likely chance that the Speaker of the current Legislative Assembly supported it at that time.

Mrs. Jablonski: Did it go through all three readings? That's what my question is because I'd like to check it out in *Hansard*.

Dr. Sherman: You know, I'm sorry. I don't have the details of that information. We can get that for you.

The Chair: Is there anybody here with a clear memory of this? If not, Ms Quast will look into that so we can maybe get an answer to it.

Are there any other speakers? By the way, has Mr. Mason joined us yet? No. Do we have an update? We're not sure. He's on his way? Okay. Not sure. Thank you.

I have somebody over here who raised a hand. Mr. Dorward.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. I won't be able to support the motion. The reason is that I don't understand how the hypothesis that's been given to us is solved by the solution that's been given to us. The hypothesis and the concern as I heard it from you, Dr. Sherman, is that we seem to be setting our own pay. Normal scientific process is to test that to see if it's true. I don't agree necessarily that it's true at all, so it fails on that.

The solution fails as well in the sense that I don't see how that motion is any different in terms of us setting our own pay, if that was the case – and I don't agree that it's the case – because it simply says that a different group is going to assist the judge to come up with, essentially, what was come up with now by a judge. The Assembly still has to approve that. Presumably, it would be sent by the Assembly to this committee. We would still go through a very similar process to what we just went through, and it would go back to the Assembly, or the Assembly would just accept it. I just don't think that there's a solution there for the issue that you raise about setting your own pay under our present situation of the legislative process in Alberta.

Dr. Sherman: With all due respect, hon. member, the Premier – our Premier – made a commitment to have MLA pay independently set and reviewed. She commissioned a report, but she didn't like the findings of the report. Some findings she liked.

Mrs. Jablonski: Did you? Do you like the findings?

Dr. Sherman: There were many findings in the report that I did not agree with, but the higher principle is that we should not be setting our own pay. It's a conflict of interest. Can you agree with that?

The Chair: Let me just clarify, Dr. Sherman, that it wasn't the Premier who commissioned the report. It was actually the Speaker on behalf of this committee because it was this committee that was asked.

Carry on.

Dr. Sherman: But it was based on a commitment that the Premier made. Now, it was incomplete work that we have done in the last fall session in that a recommendation of that report was that three justices regularly review our compensation. Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, you yourself recognize that we must change legislation for our pay to be set so we don't have to have this conversation again.

With respect to the other hon. member, the first reading of Bill 214 was February 15, 1994. It was defeated on second reading on May 31. If you want details of that bill, I wasn't in the Legislative Assembly at the time. Perhaps Ms Calahasen was the one that was here on the government side, and the hon. Speaker was there. You might want to talk to him about the details of that bill, why the government of that day voted down that bill.

The Chair: Hon. members, at the end of the day MLAs are going to be faced with defending no matter what pay it is, no matter who makes the decisions. You're going to get beaten up just as equally whether you make the decisions or some independent body makes the decision. That's the discussion I recall, going back almost 20 years.

Let me move on. Do we have any other speakers?

Okay. Do I hear any question?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called. Those in favour of Dr. Sherman's motion, listed as item 4(b) on your agenda, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. A recorded vote has been requested. I think that with the vocal vote the noes have it, but let's go around the table here. Those in favour of the motion, please indicate your names now, starting with Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman.

Ms Smith: Danielle Smith.

The Chair: Are there others?

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth.

The Chair: We have three. Are there others? Those opposed to the motion, please say no, starting with Ms Calahasen.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen.

Mr. Young: Steve Young.

Mr. Quest: Dave Quest.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mary Anne Jablonski.

Mr. Goudreau: Hector Goudreau.

Mr. Dorward: David Dorward.

The Chair: Accordingly, that motion is defeated. Thank you.

We're going to move on to item 5, new business. We're going to start with an update from the working group on constituency office budgeting, a group which we from this committee, I'll just remind you, agreed to establish in our December meetings. I'm going to go to the volunteer chair of that working group to provide us with an update. Then we'll see where it goes.

Mr. Dorward: Can we just have the report circulated?

The Chair: You have a written report?

Mr. Dorward: Yes, I do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Just on that, Chair, if I can, as a member of the committee I have not seen that report.

The Chair: Neither have I, Mrs. Forsyth, but it's just been placed in my hands. Can I ask Ms Quast if it's possible to e-mail it?

Mr. Dorward: Do you have access to your e-mail, Mrs. Forsyth?

Mrs. Forsyth: I do. I'm just wondering why we're having a report tabled, if it couldn't have come yesterday so we had time to review it as members of the committee.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. I would say that since it's a working group, I don't know that I would even use the word "report." It says "draft" on the top of it. It's basically some of my thoughts as the person who was chairing that working group. I did e-mail it to you this morning at about 7:40, 8 o'clock.

Mrs. Forsyth: I have checked my e-mail as of now, and I haven't received it.

The Chair: Well, in any case, do we have a way of getting it to you? What's the best e-mail for us to send it to you, Heather?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I mean, it's Heather.Forsyth@assembly.ab.ca. I'm checking both my iPad and my iPhone, and I have not received anything. Period.

The Chair: I'll get Ms Quast to clarify something here.

Ms Quast: I have just had the document PDFed, and I have e-mailed it to Mrs. Forsyth at the e-mail address she just mentioned.

Mr. Dorward: I am curious about why because I had also sent it to you. Did you get it by e-mail this morning?

Ms Quast: I did not.

Mr. Dorward: Oh. That's totally my error not only in timeliness but in it failing to get to everybody. I apologize.

The Chair: Regardless, Heather, do you now have it showing up on your BlackBerry or wherever?

Mrs. Forsyth: I do. I'm just trying to open it.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks very much.

With your indulgence then, I'll just ask Mr. Dorward to give us some highlights from this update.

9:40

Mr. Dorward: Sure. Firstly, I just summarized exactly what the subcommittee – and we changed, I guess, the words to “working committee” – was tasked with. We met twice. Also, we wanted to acknowledge the good work of the LAO staff and their committee clerk in helping us go through this process.

We certainly wanted to carve off any discussion not discussed; issues related to MLAs' time, which factors into salary. We also wanted to carve off any travel, which is separately dealt with in terms of reimbursement. We simply discussed the matrix, firstly, that is used by the LAO to distribute some funds to some MLAs in the context of that. Also, we looked in general terms at the amount of office lease that's paid out for various MLAs.

The notes there. Point 1. The matrix was accepted some years ago by this committee, the Members' Services Committee, to deal with they used the words the “difficulty of representing” back in those days. We were a little confused as to how the difficulty of representing did go into the world of salaries. Certainly, we got a sense that those dollars that were allocated were more for things like salaries for constituency workers and then the budgets for things like communications and promotions within the constituency.

We recognize that it's a very difficult time to translate into hard costs these kinds of things. How many extra staff do you need once you've identified the difficulty? It's a very subjective kind of thing.

Point 3. While it was possible to identify how an MLA may have extra costs depending on a particular circumstance, it was also possible to identify how a different MLA with different issues would also have extra costs. We're not able to find a way to really measure that, how one difficulty stacks up against another difficulty, nor were we able to determine what money helps to mitigate the issue between those two.

We did have some discussion about a list of issues that seemed to go beyond the matrix. There are six things in the matrix that are looked at. We felt that there were a lot of other things that weren't looked at in the matrix. This was a list that we had, and certainly the other members of the working group may have other ones to

add to this. We went back to our caucuses and asked them if they had other things to put on this list. I don't need to go through it; it's there for you.

Then we jumped into a discussion in our last meeting about the office lease rental situation, and these are some thoughts that emerged from that. There was a strong feeling that the MLAs should still retain a lot of ability to be involved in that decision of the rent or the lease cost. We did recognize that there has to be some kind of constraint, some kind of way to make it so that MLAs 18 years from now aren't all in malls with palatial offices. Not to pick on malls, but they tend to be more expensive overall. We also acknowledged the present situation whereby the lower the office rent paid by an MLA, the more the MLA has available for staffing, promotions, and communications. We had some thought process as to whether that was a level playing field – in other words, you could call it a sacrifice by an MLA – in that having a smaller office means that they have more money for office staff or promotions or communications. This may be a decision which is fine, but on the other hand, there are some situations where MLAs are forced to pay a higher amount and can't practically lower that amount because of their particular market circumstances. Therefore, there may be an uneven playing field there.

Finally, we discussed briefly the budgeted costs that were allocated to MLAs but may not be discretionary – we called them little buckets or silos – like parking, copying, and postage. Those are those set amounts that are not discretionary to be moved into our other dollars that are more discretionary. We did acknowledge that in the budget for '13-14, approved by our Members' Services Committee this fall, winter, a certain amount of these costs will be discretionary for that budget period. We mused about whether this overall committee could discuss if there were other budget items that could be made discretionary for 2013-14 because I don't think all of them are switched into that category.

Then I think it was Member Forsyth that recommended that we consider also an in-year adjustment for '12-13 as to whether these budget items could be also made discretionary for this year. That was the feeling that I had coming out of those two meetings, and I certainly would welcome other members of the working group to fill in the gaps where I might have missed something or to correct if my thoughts here are wrong.

We have no recommendations to make. We just wanted to comment on our discussions.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mrs. Jablonski, followed by Dr. Sherman.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understand that some of our rural colleagues have a situation where they have a very large constituency by area, if not by population, and some of our colleagues are required to have more than one office; they have to have two offices. I think I have one colleague that I know of that has three offices in one case. Was there any thought or consideration given to the fact that some of the rural colleagues, MLAs who have a large constituency by area and have to have more than one office, would be able to have some help with that sort of extra expense that many of the people in Edmonton, Calgary, even Red Deer, for example, don't have to face because they can have one office?

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. This was covered in a bullet under item 4, distance from the Legislative Assembly and size of constituency. What I didn't type there was that, you know, when we had our discussions, we had kind of three columns. We had the distance from the Legislative Assembly and size of constituency. Then we

kind of thought: well, how does that affect your budget? You've identified that. And then: what could be done to mitigate that problem? Well, they could get more rent money.

So you pick out one. The intent of four is to show that there are numerous of those. For example, if I could just say on a personal note that because of Edmonton being where it is and the proximity to the Legislative Assembly for many MLAs that live in Edmonton, my budget for pictures taken at the Legislative Assembly is somewhere between \$2,900 and \$3,600. I've asked several MLAs from across the province, you know, and their budget for pictures taken at the Leg. is about a hundred dollars. So there is an inconsistency as well.

There are several of those that we identified, and we just didn't know how to weigh those and we didn't know what dollars could be applied to the weighting in order to mitigate the issue. But you've done a good job of bringing up just one of them.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may add to that as one of the committee members, Mary Anne, we had a lengthy discussion. As I indicated to the committee as someone who was with the government and who is now a member of the opposition, you're not going to win the urban-rural battle – you know that as well as I do – trying to rationalize why a rural MLA needs three offices versus what someone in an urban location will be paying. When you look at what the rent is for a rural times three offices, it equals what one rent would be in an urban riding. We had a lengthy discussion on that particular issue and spent a lot of time, to be honest with you, on that.

The other thing I just want to add is on the matrix that was provided to us. For example, they listed the ridings that get extra money. Little Bow is number one; Hector's riding is number two. So they've allowed for some extra money for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we go on to Sherman and then Calahasen, I was just reminded that last year we had this discussion. There were about 58 offices that had zero matrix monies allocated to them which will now have matrix monies allocated. Is it starting in 2013-14, David? Yeah, starting in 2013-14. So please bear that in mind.

Also, just for purposes of clarity on something that Mr. Dorward mentioned, which surfaces as item 6 on his report, with regard to four categories that I just want to highlight for you, we made the following decision. The amount allocated for postage annually and the amount allocated for office supplies annually was moved under the member's services allowance aspect of the budget so as to allow you maximum flexibility in those two categories.

9:50

To put it differently, the amount of money that was restricted for postage only or that had been allocated as restricted for office supplies is no longer restricted. You have those monies. I can't remember; one is \$750, and the other is \$1,250 or something like that. Postage is \$750, and office supplies is \$1,250, so there is an additional \$2,000 of flexibility, if you will, in there.

The parts that we did not move, which are still restricted, so to speak, for purposes of my example, are parking and copying. My memory says they were each around \$900. Is that right?

Ms Breault: Yes. Parking is \$900, and copying is, I believe, \$900 as well.

The Chair: Right. So when you look at Mr. Dorward's final sentence on item 6, he says:

The group would like the overall committee to discuss if there are other budget items that could be made discretionary for 2013-2014 and if the Members' Services Committee would consider an "in year" adjustment to budget to make these changes effective for the 2012-2013 year.

I think that is partly what is being talked about there.

Would I be right, Mr. Dorward?

Mr. Dorward: Yes. That's correct. Absolutely.

The Chair: Okay. Let me move back to the speakers list. I have Sherman, Calahasen, and Jablonski.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank Mr. Dorward for putting this together. It's the first time I'm seeing this, and I'm a member of the committee.

The premise of the discussion was that the methodology of the matrix is flawed in that, one, it references the distance to the constituency and the size of the constituency area and the density, which really are the same thing, so it's a methodology. The major things we discussed were: one, the office rent; two, staffing expense; and promotional items. It's a complex issue with the number of offices you have to have, with the socioeconomic needs.

You know, there are comments from Mrs. Forsyth that now that she's a member of the opposition, her staffing has gone up quite a bit. I think she recognizes many of the problems that the opposition constituency office staff face.

Funding for the constituency offices is a complex issue. The current methodology is flawed, so we struggled with what the new methodology should be.

The Chair: Okay. Let me move on, then. I have Ms Calahasen, followed by Mrs. Jablonski.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. I have a number of questions and maybe some comments. When you look at number 4, I see that there are elected bodies, municipalities. I would suggest that even Métis settlements should be part of that because you have identified the First Nations population as well as maybe the Métis population. I'm not exactly sure why they seem to be always forgotten.

Mrs. Forsyth: Pearl, if I may, we discussed that. We weren't forgetting about them; that was part and parcel of that. So just to reassure you.

Ms Calahasen: Okay. So somebody just didn't write it in. I understand, then. If we can have that included, that would really help in terms of communication for people who feel like they don't seem to be considered in some of these things.

The Chair: On that point, Mr. Dorward, just one sentence, quickly, of clarification so that we have it recorded.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. My understanding was that it was elected bodies. When I typed this, we had a list of about eight or nine. There were electrification units. There were irrigation folks. All of those were captured under elected bodies.

The Chair: All right. So they're included under that broader title. Thank you.

Ms Calahasen.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. Now I want to talk about the size of a constituency. As you know, my constituency is 70,000-plus square kilometres in size. I don't even know the exact number anymore. I

think that sometimes we have to be able to look at that. I know that Peace River is also in that same situation. I'm not exactly sure, Hector. I don't know if you have that much.

The one thing that we always seem to forget is the access to scheduled flights. I know we've taken that into consideration in the past. I think Little Bow is one of those that doesn't have access to scheduled flights. From my constituency, where I live, it's three hours to Grande Prairie to access a scheduled flight, three hours to Peace River if I was to get a flight, three hours to Edmonton. I'm just right in the very middle when we're talking about those kinds of things. I'm not exactly sure how many other constituencies are in that position, so I'm just asking the question. Was that taken into consideration in terms of access, to be able to take off any time you want?

The other question is on the distance from point to point in a constituency. As an example, I know that in Peace River it's the same. To get to the furthest part of his constituency, it would be – I don't know – five hours, six hours. To get from one end of my constituency to the other, it's about eight to nine hours. When you look at those kinds of point to point when you're talking about the city constituencies, even though there are a lot of people in one area, it's still easier to access your constituents to be able to communicate with them or to do face to face.

I'm not exactly sure if that kind of consideration has been given relative to effective representation. That's something that we have discussed in the past, and you'll remember this, Mr. Speaker. When we're talking about effective representation, what does that mean? I know we had a tough discussion at one point to discuss: what is effective representation? I'm not exactly sure if that has been a consideration with this committee, to be able to look at what that means and what a base is. I think we've never established that.

I'm so pleased that you're going around to check what's going on because in my constituency I have anywhere from 15 minutes to nine hours to be able to access a community. When you're looking at that, to try to get to all those communities is very difficult. I have something like 30-plus communities, and they're anywhere from 15 minutes to nine hours apart. So when we're trying to access those communities, I think we have to look into that.

I know that the cities talk about the density and the socioeconomics. In my constituency you have a huge component of my constituents – I would say it's more than 50 per cent – who also have that same issue of socioeconomic concerns.

It's really very difficult to be able to have only one constituency office. To be able to man those offices in northern Alberta – and, I know, Heather, that you talked about how the cities have high costs. When you're talking about Slave Lake, I'll give you an example. The office where I was burned down. Now I can't find a space in Slave Lake. For me to be able to get an office in Slave Lake is something like about \$1,200 a month. That's impossible.

I think those kinds of considerations have to be taken in when we're looking at the matrix, no matter what we do. If we're talking about socioeconomics, I think that goes all across Alberta. It's not specific to one area. I think that it affects all of us as we go through, and I think those kinds of things have to be taken into consideration.

Those are the kinds of areas that I've really had some real heartache about, so I would like to know whether or not these kind of things have been taken in when you're talking about the changes that could potentially come or no changes. We have to take into consideration these kinds of conditions so that we can begin to look at how we address those issues.

The Chair: Okay. Before I go to Jablonski, I wonder if I could go to ad hoc committee chair Dorward for some answers to the questions that Ms Calahasen has put on the table. She's not a member of the ad hoc committee but is asking for some clarification and that some issues not be forgotten.

Mr. Dorward: Sure. Member Goudreau will also probably speak to the rural situation because he carried it very well to that working group.

We did miss – at least, I don't recall it – a discussion on access to scheduled flights, so I've got that now on my list. The other ones generally, I would say, we talked about.

But I really want to thank you, Member, because you just did exactly what we felt was necessary to do. You expressed a difference, and then you explained why it cost more. If you had stopped before you explained why it cost more, I was having some difficulty because the difficult part as it pertains to your time is not part of the discussion. You just can't take the difficulty, throw some dollars nebulously into a budget, and then say: well, that must solve that.

That's exactly where we're at. I mean, we need to decide, and I'll express it again. What is the compensation for the difficulty proposed? Is the compensation more rent? Is the compensation more money to hire staff? I can accept those things. It's just that we were not able to find a constituency in the province that didn't have their own list of particular difficulties and, therefore, also would have their suggested list of compensations to deal with those difficulties.

10:00

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may add, David, we asked at the last meeting to find out what other provinces are doing and how our constituency offices are compensated compared to what's happening across this country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: You haven't got that information, obviously.

Mrs. Forsyth: No. We just asked for it at the last meeting.

David, like you, I've been to so many meetings this week. I think it was just at the beginning of the week that we asked for more information and haven't got it yet.

Mr. Dorward: Yes. Thank you for bringing that up. I should have had that as point 7 in my report.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, if I may, if that information is coming forward, I'm really interested to see the difference between the various provinces because when we look at the disparities between the different provinces, I think that will give us an idea as to how they have been able to address those things. There are provinces, I think, that are quite similar to ours. If we can look at those and make some determination as to what the next steps would be, I'd really look at that in terms of addressing Brian Mason's issue, which was the socioeconomic component, as well as yours, Dr. Sherman, but also the socioeconomic issue across the board and then figuring out what the anomalies are within the various constituencies. I think that's what Members' Services has always done, taken that into consideration. So I'm looking forward to that, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Yes. Well said. We have to be ever mindful that we are here as individuals, but we represent all 87 MLAs when we make decisions here, so we have to be prepared to all live by them.

Let me move on, then, to Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a question of clarification. In point 6 I think the last comment states:

The group would like the overall committee to discuss if there are other budget items that could be made discretionary for 2013-2014 and if the Members' Services Committee would consider an "in year" adjustment to budget to make these changes effective for the 2012-2013 year.

The question of clarification that I have so I might understand this is: if I have a parking allowance of \$900 or a postage allowance of \$900 and I don't use the full balance of that budget, does that mean that I can then use the balance to be allocated to other constituency expenses?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you. Mrs. Forsyth, did you want to comment further on that?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I think you've already made that very clear, Mr. Chair. We talked about that in Members' Services, and you've already said that postage and office supplies dollars are going from the restricted side to the nonrestricted side. That motion was for next year's budget. What we were talking about is: can that pertain to the balance of this year's budget?

Am I right, David?

Mr. Dorward: Yes. I would also add that we had asked to have this committee discuss whether the parking of \$900 and the copying of \$900 should also be moved into the discretionary area for this year, in year, and for '13-14. Are you in agreement with that?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes.

The Chair: Mrs. Forsyth, further?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. I agree with what David said. We're not asking for more money. What we're saying is: the balance that is in the budget for items such as parking, copying, postage, and office supplies in this year's budget, if it's not used for those restricted items, can it go into the nonrestricted for the balance of this budget year? We understand that there are many constituency offices that are struggling this year because of rents, et cetera.

The Chair: Okay. Just before I go to Mr. Young, I know, Jacquie, you're paying rapt attention to this because we had talked about it in previous meetings. I might get you to comment on how that may or may not be possible in a moment, but let me go to Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: Thank you. First of all, I appreciate Pearl outlining the fact that the whole point of the exercise is to effectively represent our constituents. Now, we have this amount of money and office space and staff to do that. It doesn't matter what we do; we are never going to get to a point where everybody agrees because we're all special; every constituency is different. And that's all right.

I think one of the issues we need to consider is that while Pearl doesn't pay for any parking, everywhere I go in Edmonton there's parking, you know, 20 bucks plus, but I don't have to travel. So we could go down and have gone down that road and identified all these different ways that we're different and special. The uniqueness of Albertans is reflected in how we need to represent them.

Coming up with some kind of weighted matrix that is so complicated is never going to – there's always going to be some disagreement. Is parking more important than travel? Is size more

important than the demographics and the ethnic nature of our constituency or the irrigation districts or rural electrification or a river valley, whatever?

So I think flexibility needs to be one of the key factors so that we can effectively make the choices where maybe I'm not going to photocopy more; like David, I'm going to take more pictures at the Leg., or I'm going to travel more, or what have you. I think the flexibility needs to be reflected in whatever amount, and then we can have the discussion: is that amount the right amount? Is it too much? Is it too little? What is the right amount? It doesn't matter what we do. I'm going to complain that I pay too much for rent, and Pearl's going to say that she travels too much. It's never going to be resolvable because they're different things. So to weight it is just going to be a futile exercise. I'd just put it that flexibility, I think, is the key thing to manage our own budgets effectively.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to just quickly go to Mr. Dorward for some clarification on something.

Mr. Dorward: Well, just on that point, the fact is that it's being weighted right now in the matrix.

The Chair: So just to perhaps reclarify, when we met last year at one of our meetings – I can't remember if it was in June or in September. December, was it? Okay. Thank you. The Clerk tells me that it was probably at one of the December meetings.

We officially said that the postage allocation, which was \$750 for the year, and the office supplies amount, which was \$1,250 for the year, be moved out of the MLA admin budget over under the member's services allowance. What that would do is that it would unrestrict those two expenditures and allow you to use as much as you wanted of those amounts to cover other expenses beyond just postage and office supplies. That has been done, but it would be effective April 1, 2013-14. What I hear as part of Mr. Dorward's update on behalf of the ad hoc committee is that they would like us to consider whether it's possible to make those two amounts applicable for the 2012-13 year, the year that we're just about to say goodbye to. So that's one part.

The second part is to take a look at two other components of our budgets. One of them is parking, which is a \$900 per year allocation, and photocopying and copying in general, which is also \$900 in our budgets, and move them from the MLA admin budget aspect over under the member's services allowance and, again, not make it effective April 1, 2013, but make it applicable to 2012-13 within available dollars. This is revenue or expense neutral, so to speak. There's no adding of monies; there's no taking away of monies. It just says that if you're recognizing the modern age of communication, for example, we may or may not be spending that much money on postage, but we do need money elsewhere.

The same thing could be said with parking. Some of our locations around the province don't have nearly the expense for parking as, perhaps, urban areas do, for example. So the intent, as I understand it, Mr. Dorward – and correct me if I'm wrong here – is to give greater flexibility in these two other areas and then take all four areas and make them applicable for 2012-13 as opposed to waiting until '13-14.

Mr. Dorward: Yes, that would be correct. But I do want to recognize that I think it's always important in a situation like this that we consider the cost also of administration of things. Any time we can reduce the burden of cost by administration having to do things, I think it's valid. I do think there are some savings here. The LAO staff could comment, but I just think it's going to be easier for them when they don't have to in a more detailed way go

through postage, office supplies, parking, and copying as separate items and can just look at those expenditures in the broad context of the amount of money that MLAs get.

10:10

The Chair: Okay. Jacquie, are you good on what it is that's being asked here?

Ms Breault: Yeah. I believe so. One comment I would like to make is with regard to the parking. Right now that \$900 cap is in the transportation order, section 1(g), whereby it allows members to have parking expenses incurred up to \$900. That's in addition to airport parking; airport parking is unlimited. So if a member incurs costs there, it's not included in the \$900. I believe that there may be a change required. Also, it's the one thing as opposed to the three other items that is sort of divorced from the constituency office. It's attached more to the member as member versus constituency business or constituency office operations, I guess.

The Chair: Thank you.

Let me go to the Clerk for some added comments, please.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. I did make the comment in the working group that the parking is something that applies for the member's expenses across the province. It's not specifically a constituency expense, so there's a question as to whether or not that should be something that remains across the province, or is that parking just related to constituency expenses? That was one that I, I guess, raised a caution about, whether or not that \$900 should be transferred to the constituency office budget.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Young: I did not want to make any suggestions, and I appreciate how it's been treated. I just want to try and articulate the differences and challenges for each one and that we need to be flexible while appropriate in terms of how we manage our dollars.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Just a process question. I'm wondering if a motion is going to emerge out of this discussion because this is quite a level of detail that I had thought perhaps the committee would consider and then come back with a series of motions to give direction. I mean, I suppose we can continue talking about it, but I'm just kind of wondering from a process point of view: are we actually moving to a decision, or is it that we're just actually discussing this? Maybe the chair of the committee can let us know.

Mr. Dorward: Well, we felt as a working group that we weren't tasked with coming up with motions. That isn't to say that the same group couldn't be tasked with that. I'm not prepared to make a motion on it myself, I have to say, but there are lots of people on this committee if they want to. I certainly understand if we need to table this one until the next meeting and task the working group to get together to see if they can make some motions. We kind of felt that this is background and that this Members' Services Committee should drive the process forward with respect to motions rather than us.

Please, other members of the committee, speak to that if I'm offside in what I just said.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm in agreement with David. I keep finding myself agreeing with David, which I didn't think I'd ever be able to do, but I am in agreement. We weren't looking at making a motion on this particular issue. We were tasked with the

discussion in regard to looking at the compensation issue, the differences in what our MLAs across this province are facing.

I think there's a lot of work that has to be done still. As I explained, we haven't seen what other provinces are doing. Mind you, I will say that what I have heard – and I may be wrong in what I'm saying – is that Alberta has the richest compensation package as far as constituency offices. I'm hoping, when we get the information, that I'm wrong.

I also have to say that I had made it very clear during this motion that with the budget the way it is, we're not asking for more money at this particular time because it's just not a fiscal reality. What we were talking about is moving the money that's in the budget already and allowing members, for example, if they haven't utilized all their parking or their constituency copying or their postage, to be able to help them through the budget period for the remaining time this year and then to go from restricted to nonrestricted next year.

The Chair: Thank you. I think that parallels what I said about five minutes ago. I think that the LAO staff who are here, including Parliamentary Counsel and others, have the gist of what it is that I think the ad hoc committee would be recommending the MSC as a committee consider. We don't have any motions at this stage.

I'm going to propose here, since we're almost halfway through, that we take a short break and just decide how it is that you might want to proceed. Unless there are any other comments or new points that haven't yet been phrased, I would ask that we take a short break here. Are there any other speakers on this item?

Mrs. Jablonski: Very quickly. If we are to deal with this before the end of the fiscal year, I suppose that we will be getting back together as a committee to bring this forward again before the end of the fiscal year.

The Chair: We would definitely be having at least one more meeting of the MSC, in my view, especially if we want to put the nature and thrust of item 6 here as enunciated by the ad hoc committee into some formal state such as by motion. Orders would have to be changed. One is the transportation order. Another is our member's services allowances. We would need some guidance from our LAO staff as to how that might be done.

What's important right now is that MLAs who are listening in and MLAs that will be communicated to by each of the caucus representatives here would know that the spirit of what we're trying to do is just to give them more flexibility with monies that have already been allocated and that it would be cost neutral to the taxpayers. There are no additional monies being asked for here whatsoever.

Okay. So let's take a 10-minute break here for comfort and for purposes of others seeking clarity, and we will reconvene at 10:30, bearing in mind that we will be adjourning at 12 noon or as close as possible to allow schedules already preset by members and others to be honoured.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:17 a.m. to 10:31 a.m.]

The Chair: All right. Let us move on. We left off discussing the draft update from the working committee, chaired by Mr. Dorward. Just by way of a refresher, I would add that that group is comprised of Mr. Goudreau, Mr. Mason, Mrs. Forsyth, Dr. Sherman, and Mr. Dorward. I think the gist and the spirit of what I heard is that the update would include a request for our MS Committee to review those four areas that I enunciated earlier – the postage, the office supplies, the parking, and the copying – and

see if they could be made flexible for the 2012-13 year as expenditures.

Now, I don't think we need a motion necessarily at this stage, but I think that if that's the thrust of where you want us to go, then we could ask our LAO staff to work up the necessary paperwork for the next meeting to put that into effect. But I'm at your whim.

Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree with everything that you said. I just have a question that I would like to have discussed or clarified by our committee. For example, if we have the \$900 parking allowance and we don't use it all, we're asking that we be allowed to be flexible with that and use it in our constituency allowance. On the other side of the story, if I were to use a thousand dollars in parking, could I then take the other hundred dollars from my constituency budget to pay for that parking?

The Chair: It works both ways. That's my understanding. Jacquie, would that be right?

Ms Breault: I would suggest that if there was an interest in moving the parking budget cap amount into the MSA, you'd want to move the expenses and the budget together so that you weren't managing a parking cap and the MSA balances at the same time. That's just sort of my initial thought.

The Chair: That's why I say that the paperwork would have to be reviewed and prepared by LAO staff, because there might be other little complications.

Also, I should mention that our director of financial management and admin services, Scott Ellis, lost his father a few days ago, so unfortunately he is not able to join us today. The funeral was yesterday. Condolences have been sent on behalf of all members.

That's why I'm saying that if the thrust and the gist of where you want the issues to go is as I have outlined, then we'd be prepared to do that and come back to you with some paperwork in that respect.

Any other comments?

Ms Breault: I think it would be up to the committee as to whether they wished to keep that \$900 cap on parking regardless of where it was budgeted in terms of eligible expenditures or not.

The Chair: I think we're clear on that.

Okay. Are there any other comments pertaining to the update other than the follow-up that I'm going to add unofficially? Mr. Dorward and committee members, on your update it would be item 7, to be clear, and that would be getting comparisons of constituency office expenses as experienced by other provinces. That, too, will be proceeded with, and I assume that we'll try and get some assistance from LAO staff. David McNeil says that that's already in process, so perhaps we'll be in a position to get that information updated for ourselves at the next meeting.

Mr. Dorward, please, to put some finishing touches, then, on your update. Then we'll move on.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. Number 7 would be fine, as you stated, Mr. Chair. Just to be clear, I understand that our working group will find a date to reconvene once we know the interprovincial numbers and to come forward with some motions, working with LAO staff to review this issue. It was stated in number 6 in my update.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

To all the members of the committee and to you, Chair Dorward: thank you very much for a very good and thorough first update to our MS Committee.

Let us move on, then, to new business, item 5(b). MLA Compensation is the heading. I'll go to Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Chair. By now I think all of us are very aware of the budget realities our province is facing, and I think it would be appropriate that MLAs take leadership by not accepting any pay increases over the next year, scheduled or otherwise. Just to be clear, MLAs need to be taking a zero per cent increase in the next year.

I have a motion that I can read out with your permission.

The Chair: Do you have it in print for circulation?

Mr. Young: I do.

The Chair: Could we circulate it? At the same time, how long or complicated is it?

Mr. Young: Well, I think it's very clear and simple.

The Chair: It's essentially a freeze on MLA pay?

Mr. Young: Yeah. I'll read it with your indulgence.

The Chair: Okay. It's being circulated.

How do we get a copy to Mrs. Forsyth, Allison?

Ms Quast: I'm just about to hit Send.

The Chair: Okay. Mrs. Forsyth, Allison Quast will be sending it to you right now.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Okay. Thanks.

Just on that note, Mr. Speaker, you had brought up to this committee on a couple of occasions the importance of the 24-hour notice. I know these motions came in – I'm not sure if it was late last night – and now we're once again tabling a motion at the table. I just wanted to bring that up again.

The Chair: Yes. Before I go to Ms Smith, who also has a point of clarification, I'm sure, I had indicated last year – I can't remember at which meeting it was, probably going back to June or September for sure – that if anyone wishes to put an item on the agenda that is of a substantive nature, please give us 24 hours' or one clear day's notice insofar as it is possible.

I was notified of these three items, and I sent that around yesterday morning as quickly as I could after I was notified, so they are here today. But the chair has no way of knowing whether or not motions will accompany the issues. In this case we have a motion that accompanies this issue, and that is all that the chair knows.

Ms Smith: Well, I just have a point of order because I would note that the Premier tweeted at 8:55 this morning, before this committee even commenced, "Proud of my PC team for leading by example: PCs will freeze MLA pay and housing allowances today." I guess I'm just a bit confused about how it is that the committee is independent, which you have said many, many times. We actually have a person who isn't a member of the committee – last time I checked, Ms Redford wasn't a member of the committee – predetermining the result of what this committee will decide today before the members of the opposition have even been made aware of the motions that are being put forward.

10:40

The reason why I put this forward is that I have two motions that I was going to table today. I circulated them with my caucus. We had a debate about our support for the motions. I have to say that if any one of my MLAs had tweeted what those motions would be before I brought them forward to this committee so that the members of this committee would have been able to see them before they were out there in the broader public, I would think that someone might have raised a point of personal privilege on me. I think we either respect the process that we go through, we respect the work of this committee, we say that the work of this committee is independent, or we don't.

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if you might write a letter to the MLA in question, the MLA for Calgary-Elbow, telling her that she is preempting the work of this committee by predetermining the results before members of this committee have had a chance to review the resolutions.

The Chair: I have Mr. Dorward, followed by Dr. Sherman.

Mrs. Forsyth: I would like to be on that, too, please.

The Chair: Followed by Mrs. Forsyth.

Mr. Dorward: Well, my gracious sakes alive. Maybe we could have a rereading of that tweet.

Ms Smith: I'd be happy to reread the tweet. "Proud of my PC team for leading by example: PCs will freeze MLA pay and housing allowances today."

Mr. Dorward: As a member of the PC team I'm proud to say that in caucus I was able to say, including a strong message to my leader, the Premier of the province, that I was willing to accept no increase. I am proud to say that I talked to other MLAs who were going to agree with freezing anything else with respect to the amount that MLAs get currently. For me to know that my leader is happy about me as an independent person who is on this committee, proud to be able to say that I'm going to freeze that, and for her to be able to tell people out in the Twitter world that that's the case, I'm really happy about, that she would express that she's happy that I'm going to say that at this committee meeting. I don't think that she was making any motion. I don't think she was telling anybody what to do. I do know that she was expressing exactly what I said.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have Dr. Sherman, followed by Mrs. Forsyth.

Ms Smith: I'll go on the list again, too, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has actually brought into question the integrity of this whole committee. This committee is led by you. The Premier herself is predetermining a decision, and we haven't even had this conversation. This is a major political gaffe by the Premier of our province. I personally find it offensive that she's talking about her team. She is the leader of our province. This committee is appointed to hash out difficult decisions, and sometimes it's not about voting along party lines. Sometimes it's to improve current policy that we have. It's refreshing that the Wildrose and the Liberals are able to find common ground on many of these issues, but the government unanimously is voting, and the Premier has already predetermined

this decision. I believe it brings into question the integrity of this committee. Frankly speaking, this is turning out to be a sham.

I for one will not have any further discussions today on any of these motions, and I ask your leave to recuse myself because, frankly, this is a waste of time, and it's a waste of taxpayer money, the way this government is running this committee.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I appreciate what everybody is saying. I do appreciate what Mr. Dorward is saying about how proud he is that his Premier is taking the lead on the PC team for leading by example and that we're going to be freezing the MLA pay and housing allowances today. That's all well and good. I can understand where he's coming from, that he's proud to be part of the team.

Here's the problem I have with the tweet, and here's the problem that I brought up on several occasions – that's recorded in *Hansard* – in regard to the independence of this committee. I'm going to go back to when we were discussing the budget, your budget, actually, Mr. Speaker. I asked for clarification on several occasions, if you had had any discussion with the government in regard to the fiscal reality that this province is facing in regard to the increases in your particular budget.

Your comment back – and it is in *Hansard* – was: no; this is an independent committee, and it's not up to the government to tell me as the chair and as Speaker of this Legislature about the budget that we're discussing. So we're now in a position where we have not even discussed MLA compensation, we have not discussed temporary residence allowances, nor have we discussed MLA travel allowances. But we have the Premier of this province talking about how proud she is of her PC team for leading by example; PCs will freeze MLA pay and housing allowances today.

I think what's in question is the independence of this particular committee. I think it's serious. If the Premier of the province can usurp a process of this particular committee, then maybe we as members can bring a motion forward in regard to the fiscal reality, and we have to readdress your budget in regard to looking at the fiscal concerns that we are being faced with in this province.

The Chair: Thank you. Just for purposes of the record I stand by my comments because they are true.

Ms Smith: Let me just articulate some of the difficulties that we have when you have a nonmember of this committee predetermining the outcome and putting it out in the media before we've had a chance to discuss it. I received a phone call from 660 AM news at about 10 o'clock this morning asking me to respond to the PC initiative to freeze MLA pay, that we hadn't even discussed and voted on yet.

As a member of this committee I find it remarkable that the media is already out there discussing something that hadn't even been put forward to this committee for consideration, and I'm being called as a member of the opposition to comment on it while I'm in the committee that is supposed to be considering this work. I hope the members opposite can see what an incredible breach that is of the work this committee is supposed to be doing, that the members of this committee don't have an opportunity to even know what the motions are before the broader public is discussing them as if they've already been passed. You know, I'd be happy to return 660News's phone call as soon as we've actually debated this motion as a committee.

As you probably know – maybe you don't – I spoke with Rob Reynolds this week. I was prepared today to put forward a similar motion, which I'll read into the record. Again, I'm glad to have

been able to share it with the members of the committee first before a member of my caucus chose to tweet it.

The motion I was going to put forward is very much along the lines of what Mr. Young put forward, to move that despite section 2 of the members' committee allowances order, section 1.1 of the Executive Council salaries order, and section 4.1 of the members' allowances order there will be no increase to the salaries and allowances addressed in those orders for the fiscal year commencing April 1, 2013, and ending March 31, 2014.

Now, as a member of this committee I think it was important to read that into the record . . .

The Chair: Just let me interrupt for a moment, Ms Smith.

Ms Smith: . . . and point out that Ms Redford . . .

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms Smith. Let me just indicate to you that we have one motion on the floor already. I can appreciate that you wanted to move a similar motion, but we have this motion on the floor already, and it's been circulated now.

You asked about a point of order and a point of clarification, as did others. I think we've had quite a few comments about that already, so let's get back to the order of the day. Are there any other points of clarification needed under this heading of points of clarification or points of order? I've heard two already, and we're talking essentially procedure.

Just before we go on, why don't you just read what you circulated 15 minutes ago, Mr. Young, and then we'll carry on.

Mr. Young: Thank you. I appreciate that. I move that notwithstanding section 2 of the members' committee allowances order, section 1.1 of the Executive Council salaries order, and section 4.1 of the members' allowances order there shall be no increase to the salaries and allowances in those orders for the fiscal year commencing April 1, 2013, and ending March 31, 2014.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, I have a speaking order here. I have Mrs. Jablonski next, and then I think Ms Smith wants back on and Mr. Mason and then Mr. Dorward, so let's proceed in that order.

10:50

Mrs. Jablonski: My comments are that I believe that we all understand the fiscal situation that we're in. I know that our caucus has discussed and I'm sure that the other caucuses have discussed the difficulties that we're facing, so it was no surprise to any of our caucus that we would be moving to freeze any increase that might have been coming forward and to freeze salaries. Just to clarify, I'm sure that most caucuses understand that this is probably a very good thing for us to do, and I would like to wholly support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: You can add me again, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith: I would like the Speaker to respond to the points of clarification about whether or not this is out of order, for another member outside this committee to be predetermining or exposing what the resolutions are to the broader public before we've even had a chance to consider them.

The Chair: Well, the chair has no ability to control what other members wish to say or do at any particular time. All that the

chair can do is chair this particular meeting, which is convened for specific purposes, which everyone was alerted to almost 24 hours ago. I don't have a point of clarification here at this time on this issue other than to say that I can't control what you say, Ms Smith, any more than I can control what the Premier or anyone else says. There have been a lot of things over the last year that have been said about this committee, a lot of things that have been said about the workings of the committee which the chair took no umbrage with, and I'm not going to take any at this time either.

Let's move on, please. The next speaker I have is Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Dorward, followed by Mrs. Forsyth.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would like to raise a point of privilege with respect to the Premier. Now, the Premier has predetermined the actions of this committee in making an announcement that certain things were going to be done, including a freeze on MLA salaries. Only this committee can make that decision. The Premier has repeatedly said that this is a committee of independent members, and you yourself reinforced that on a number of occasions, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a committee of the government. For the Premier to pre-empt this committee and make an announcement about a decision that has not yet been made or discussed by the members of this committee is, in fact, a violation of the rights of members and of the House, and I submit to you that we need to have a ruling. I, of course, have not had time to prepare precedents, but I can supply those to you. The rules do require a point of privilege to be raised at the first available opportunity, which is now.

The Chair: Thank you. That's been noted, and Parliamentary Counsel is just looking into the logistics of your point right now.

Meanwhile let me move on to Mr. Dorward, followed by Mrs. Forsyth, followed by Mrs. Jablonski.

Mr. Dorward: Well, I've got a little bit of consternation because there have been many, many times in the last nine months when there have been references made by individuals on this committee that they needed to go back to their caucus and decide something prior to . . .

Mr. Mason: You can't debate my point now. It's not up for debate.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Mason, I wasn't debating your point at all.

The Chair: Just carry on, Mr. Dorward. We'll recognize Mr. Mason again, if he wishes, on the list.

Mr. Dorward: In fact, I think we've delayed decisions at times in order to be able to go back to our caucus, and now I hear members of this committee saying that it's impossible to speak to members of your caucus and have them express out there in the world the things that we as members discussed at that caucus meeting. If they want to express that out there to the Twitter world, well, I think that's just fine, and if they're concurrent, in fact, with the comments that I made at caucus and that somewhat led the discussion relative to that, I think that's absolutely wonderful. That's how I read the tweet, which I've now found. I think that fundamentally, yes, we need to discuss with our caucus and bring to the table here as individual MLAs but also discuss with our colleagues what kind of sense we should have as we come to this table, and I think that's all that's happened here, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth, followed by Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As someone who, like you, has been around for a long time, I am somewhat – I can't even think of the word, to be honest with you, in regard to the point of privilege that Mr. Mason has brought up and the predetermined action of this committee and the independence of this particular committee. What the Premier has done calls into question the independence of all of the other committees. She has proudly stood up in the Chamber on numerous occasions talking about the independence of the committee. That is what the question is. What I would like to see is that we look at a point of privilege. You have lawyers onside in regard to the seriousness of the allegations that we were dealing with on this particular issue.

Again, we need to reinforce what she has said in her tweet, which is that she's "proud of [her] PC team for leading by example: PCs will freeze MLA pay and housing allowances today." That's usurping a decision, whether we agree with her or disagree with her, that has not even been made at a committee that is supposed to be independent. This is serious, and that's all I can say. It calls into question, again, the independence of all the committees that are out there if we start seeing tweets from the Premier of this province, whether she agrees or disagrees, about a decision that hasn't even been made.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair is at a disadvantage, not having seen the tweet, but I'm taking members at their word that they have.

I have to move on here. Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Many times in this committee – and you will find this in *Hansard* – our members have said: this is something that I need to take back to my caucus and that I need to discuss with my caucus. Making a decision in this committee isn't just up to each one of us who sit here even though we are an independent body. When we make a decision, many times we have discussed that decision with our caucuses prior, or we ask that we be able to have the time to take it back to our caucus for a decision. Independent, yes, but we all recognize the importance of discussing these things with our caucus.

I would say to you that we did discuss this with our caucus, and our caucus was aware that we were going to be bringing these discussions forward to this committee. In our caucus we made a decision. I would say to you that I suppose the problem might be that the Premier and our caucus members – and we gave notice yesterday about these motions – were aware that we were moving to freeze the MLA pay and the housing allowance. Those two words, "moving to," weren't represented. Once again, the point is that we are independent, we do go back to our caucuses to discuss this, and I don't think there has been any misrepresentation here at all.

The Chair: I have Mr. Young, Ms Smith, Mr. Mason, Mr. Dorward so far.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a representative on this committee I'm independent. All our members are independent. We speak to our constituents, we speak to businessmen, we speak to, you know, other representatives, other groups, and we also speak to our caucus. I chair our caucus. I have 61 MLAs, and they all have an opinion. I speak to them, and everybody on that committee speaks to them. We discuss this, and we come to a resolution in support for the direction or ideas that we want to put forward.

They know the direction that we're moving forward in, and that is to not accept any increase in MLA pay given the fiscal situation

we're in. That's no secret, and I'm quite pleased that the Premier supports our decision and my motion. I look forward to the discussion on the motion about freezing pay, and then I look forward to what the vote is on that. If it's okay with any of the other members, I'll tweet that, too.

Ms Smith: Well, we may be able to find some agreement, then, because I think Mrs. Jablonski is quite right that when we get surprised with motions that come forward from any caucus, we have had a practice where, rather than asking us to vote on issues that we haven't had a chance to take back to caucus, we defer the decision until we do have that opportunity for a full caucus discussion.

Now, I can say that our members will support the motion that Mr. Young has put forward on this particular issue. I probably would amend it, but I would have to say, Mr. Chair, that because we don't have Liberal representation – this would be a brand new motion for them – we would be making significant decisions over the compensation . . .

Mrs. Jablonski: That was their choice.

Mr. Young: He walked out of here.

Ms Smith: No. But, again, he just found out about it from the tweet this morning, so he hasn't had an opportunity.

I mean, I don't mean to speak – there was no motion that was circulated to the caucus in advance, so he wouldn't have been able to have an opportunity to talk to his four other caucus members. I'm sure that this is a surprise to Mr. Mason as well. I'm quite sure he hasn't had an opportunity to talk to three of his caucus members.

11:00

I mean, I think perhaps from a process point of view, Mr. Chair, if we want to make sure that this is a committee that represents all members – we're making significant changes to compensation – perhaps the best way to proceed is that since the resolutions weren't circulated in advance so that we could talk about them with our caucus, I would like for us to table this so we could all take it back, have that discussion, and also see the other motions that Mr. Young is intending to bring forward.

I have to tell you that I have no idea from looking at the line items on the agenda. The line items on the agenda that I received simply said: temporary residence allowances for MLAs and MLA travel allowances. I have absolutely no idea what is going to be proposed under those two provisions. I would go back to Ms Redford's tweet to see if I could actually get some indication, but she didn't tweet anything about travel allowances, so I'm not even able to go to her as an outside source to figure that out.

I would say that it's a bit premature for us to vote on any of these motions today, and I would ask that since we already have a well-established practice that when resolutions come forward that require significant caucus input – I'm glad that your caucus has had input on this. Our caucus has had input on at least one of the motions that you're putting forward. I just don't think that it's fair to the Liberals or the NDs, since they are being blindsided by these motions, that we would expect for them to vote on them today.

So I wonder, Mr. Chair, if you can give us some direction about how to proceed. I'd be quite happy for us to table this without a vote so that we can take it back and then move on to Mr. Young's other resolution so that I'm able to have full information to take

back to my caucus for a full discussion, and then we can have another Members' Services Committee meeting.

The Chair: I will comment right away, but I have Mason and Dorward and Quest still on the speaking list.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. First, I'd like to deal with some of the really spurious arguments that some of the government members have made. You know, it may well be that the Conservative caucus has discussed this, but others caucuses have not. I know you think that you're the whole universe around here, but the fact of the matter is that – and Mrs. Jablonski agrees with me. The, I guess, arrogance of the idea that you're going to decide in your caucus, the Premier is going to announce it on Twitter, we're going to walk in here, we don't even know what you're going to talk about, we don't even know what your motion is, and we're just supposed to accept it, you know, is just not acceptable. It's far from being the kind of transparent and democratic new world that Premier Redford promised in the last election. It's far from giving the opposition the role and respect that she talked about. It's yet another in a series of broken promises.

As I look at what's going on, we've got the Wildrose and the Conservatives egging each other on to make cuts in the budget, and of course symbolically you have to start with the MLAs themselves. I think that's what this is all about. It's the New Democrats that are fighting to protect our public services like health care and like education, to improve protection for the environment, and to get fair value for the resources that we have.

Obviously, the Conservative Party is following the lead of the Wildrose in a race to the bottom, and it's not something that we want to be part of. It's not that there's any problem, as far as we're concerned, with the current level of MLA compensation. It's most generous. The point is that this is being done as a symbolic thing to open the door to wage freezes for provincial employees, for nurses and teachers and everybody else that the government made extravagant promises to in the election. Now it's going to break them, and it's starting today.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think this motion should be on the floor, I don't think the Premier should have announced the decision before it was made, and we don't support the direction on the budget where the Wildrose and the PC Party are headed.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Chair, in response to the comment that other caucuses didn't get a chance to do this, that, or the other thing, the Premier's tweet simply said that she's glad that the PC caucus is going to do this and make a motion. [interjection] Thank you, hon. member, for saying that because for a member opposite – I'll use those words – to say that there needs to be a motion sent out to everybody just after the hon. member tried to make a motion that wasn't sent out to everybody in the middle of a discussion of a motion and to also say that this motion should have been sent out to everybody, which means that it would have been somewhat out there in the public domain, very clearly, at least to members of this committee, and then it would have been out there to everybody – therefore, it would have made sense for the Premier to have tweeted that her PC caucus is obviously prepared to do this because the motion is before everybody – and then to complain about a tweet that says that, I don't understand.

If we're supposed to put the motion out before to everybody, in which case it is out there and is therefore our feelings – otherwise, we wouldn't have put it out there – and then to complain about the fact that somebody said what our feelings were, it's not lining up very well.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, if you could put me on the list again, please.

The Chair: Just a moment, here. I have Mr. Quest, followed by Ms Smith. So it'll be Quest, followed by Smith, followed by Forsyth.

Mrs. Jablonski: And may I be on the list, too, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: And then Jablonski.
Okay. Let's go. Mr. Quest.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope we can move quickly towards the question. It's been made clear what our caucus has already discussed and the direction we want to go. We have the general support, I believe, of Ms Smith. With respect to the Liberals Dr. Sherman and, I would assume as leader of the Liberal caucus, his caucus have made it very clear numerous times that they're not going to take a position or vote on anything to do with MLA pay. I could be wrong, but it seems to me that Dr. Sherman has left the room every time there has been a vote regarding MLA pay. Why would we anticipate anything different today? So I think that their position is already very clear, and I think it's fairly clear where this motion is going to go.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Well, I think the tweet makes it quite clear that she wasn't commenting that the PCs would put forward a motion to do something. It said that the "PCs will freeze MLA pay and [MLA] housing" today. So I think that that is a different tone than what is being presented by the members opposite.

I think that the bigger point, though, Mr. Speaker – I mean, I'm happy to debate the content of the motion. But I do think you have to rule on whether or not receiving this motion, we would be taking this back to caucus for discussion in keeping with the past practice of this committee. I think that Mr. Mason has made it fairly clear that this is a motion that came out of the blue. He hasn't had an opportunity to discuss it with his caucus. So I'm happy to debate the content of it, but I do need to understand whether or not you're going to keep with past practice or whether we're going to forge ahead to a vote. Because if we're going to forge ahead to a vote, I will go back on the speakers list and make some comments on this, but if we're going to defer it to a future meeting, I can wait to make those comments.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, if I may, there's no question about the support for what the Premier has tweeted. We all know about the fiscal reality in this province. My concern is again – and I'm going to repeat this – about the independence of the committee and usurping a decision that has not already been made and how it affects other independent committees that we have in the Legislature, whether it's the Ethics Commissioner or anything like that.

This is a Premier who's talked about transparency and how she's going to govern differently, the role and respect that she is going to provide the opposition. This is a Premier that has stood up on numerous occasions in the Chamber, when questioned by members of the opposition, about: how dare we think about usurping the independence of any committee in the Legislature and how she respects the independence of the committees. This is what the problem is. It's tweeting very early in the morning about a decision that, first of all, the committee hasn't even seen and,

secondly, that hasn't even been discussed. I don't care if she tweeted that she's proud of her PC team and that they're not going to do whatever. What it is is that it's about the independence of this committee, and that's more frightening to me than anything.

11:10

We truly need to go back and find out what other tweets, as mentioned, have been brought up before a committee decision. I can't remember any. I know there were tweets during the committee, but I do not remember the Premier ever tweeting anything, and I can go back to Premier Stelmach, Premier Klein on what has been done in regard to a decision before any independent committee, period.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I have two points to make. First of all, I would like to correct Mr. Mason, who improperly spoke to say what I thought. Mr. Mason said that I agreed with him that the PC Party thinks that we are the whole world. I indicated to him that that was what he thought – and thank you for that thought – but it's not what I thought.

Having made that correction, I'll move on to my next point. I'm also very surprised that, considering the economic realities of our province, the opposition would not agree with us on freezing the pay and the salaries of all MLAs. My caucus members and some of my constituents with whom I've had the opportunity to discuss this situation and this position, about freezing our salaries, have all agreed that that's a good idea, and they knew that we were going to move to freeze these salaries.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Since everybody seems to be misquoting everybody, maybe I'll just correct the record, Mrs. Jablonski. I just want to read you an e-mail that I drafted yesterday to send to Mr. Young just so you know where my thinking was. I didn't bring this forward because I needed to figure out whether or not this automatic increase was coming forward. I managed to work that out with Mr. Reynolds. I wanted to consult with my caucus, and I figured I would introduce the motion. You would then take it back to your caucus and discuss.

To Mr. Dorward's point, I wasn't expecting a vote today. I knew that this is a pretty important issue that people would need to discuss with their caucuses. So that was my approach, to send a note to Mr. Young that I wrote yesterday. "I'm going to put forward a motion to forgo the automatic inflation increase for MLAs on April 1. A reporter asked me a few days ago about it, and I said we would support it if Ms Redford put it forward, and I would look into the process for doing that. It appears that this would have to be done through Members' Services. Would your caucus be willing to support this in a spirit of bipartisanship? I think it would be a difficult sell to the public to see another MLA pay increase right after a tough budget. Perhaps you could second it if you agree. Let me know."

Now, I didn't send that, but I did want you to understand my thinking that was going into my drafting of this motion yesterday. I think that, unfortunately, this committee has tended not to respect all of the members of the committee, and I think that having a little bit more back-and-forth dialogue before we go into meetings, to find out whether or not there is going to be support for motions rather than being blindsided by them coming in, is something that we should try to get into a practice of.

I'm a bit disappointed that we have again another couple of motions that, it sounds like, are coming forward that we don't know about.

Again I want to go back to find out from the chair: are you intending for us to move forward to a vote on this? I'm quite happy to speak in favour of the motion today if you want, but if you want to move along because we're going to defer it, then I'm happy to do that as well. I just need to get some direction from the chair about whether you're going to respect all of the members of the committee, those who have not had a chance to be consulted on this, and defer it to another meeting so that we can actually come back and have the full input.

The Chair: Let me indicate that the chair is at the whim of the committee. That's number one. Number two, the chair does respect all members of this committee. Number three, we had one member excuse himself – I think it was Dr. Sherman – at 10:44 a.m., we had another member, Mr. Mason, just join us at 10:47, and I respect both of them, one for his absence, the other for his presence, and all the rest of you for your comments.

I would like to move along with the motion we have before us. Now, I have two more speakers here. I have Mr. Young, and then I have Mr. Mason, and then I'd like to make a point of clarification because I believe Mr. Mason has moved a point of privilege, and I want to come back to that issue.

Is that what I heard you say earlier, Mr. Mason? Just yes or no.

Mr. Mason: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. Let's try and conclude the current speaking list, and then we'll try and move on with the business of this committee.

Mr. Young: Well, I just wanted to respond to the hon. member about the e-mail that she didn't send and about how well crafted it was. I just want to, you know, maybe reply with what I would have said had you sent it. I would have said: "Thank you very much for your e-mail. We are already moving forward with the motion. Wait until tomorrow, and you'll see a tweet from the Premier."

Mr. Mason: Well, that's how we do business in the brave new world, I guess, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to say to members opposite and also on this side in the Wildrose Party that there are choices that have been made by the government. They've chosen even though they promised – and it's very clear – in the election that there would be no tax increases and no service cuts and no deficit, by the way – the only promise that they're keeping is the one about taxes.

I just want to go back a little bit to the time when Mr. Klein was the Premier and to some of the decisions that were made at that time.

Mr. Young: Are we on topic with the motion?

The Chair: Yeah. I was just going to say, Mr. Mason, that we're talking about the motion here.

Mr. Mason: I'm speaking to the motion and to why I don't think that it's advisable to support the motion, okay? There are a lot of things that go into it, a lot of assumptions that go into it that I wish to challenge. The basic assumption is that we're in a financial mess that's unavoidable and that we all have to make sacrifices. That's the basic line coming out of this government. That's the basic line that comes out of the government every time the price

of oil or natural gas takes a drop, and it's something that I want to challenge. I want to be on the record about it.

When natural gas prices were sky-high, 10 years ago or so, there was a huge surplus of royalty revenue from natural gas. At its peak it was \$8 billion of additional revenue in a single year. That is no longer the case, but when that was happening, the Klein government made a couple of decisions, first with Stockwell Day of eternal memory.

Mrs. Jablonski: He's still alive.

Mr. Mason: I know. I guess you'd say that if he was dead. I didn't mean it that way. It's just that he's seared into my brain. That's all.

He imposed a flat tax on personal income that amounted to a massive tax cut for the wealthiest Albertans and a loss of billions of dollars of revenue for the province, which was made up for by the gas royalties at the time. Then Steve West brought in a plan to cut corporate taxes on corporate profits from 16 per cent to 8. We're down to about 10 now. That's also billions of dollars.

Now that the royalty revenue isn't there anymore, we're in a structural fiscal crisis that the government has known about and been warned about by us and others for years and has failed to deal with. Now the Premier has ruled out reversing those tax cuts, which means that the only solution will be a massive increase in the deficit or massive service cuts, wage freezes, rollbacks or potentially all three.

Those were decisions made by the government, and this motion assumes that those things are given and that they can't be changed, that they're just the natural order of things. I want to say clearly that I do not support wage freezes in the civil service, for teachers, for nurses, or for doctors. I think that the government should negotiate in good faith with those organizations.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, I'm sorry to interject, but we're not talking about teachers or doctors or civil servants here. Please. I've been very patient listening to you. We have a motion on the floor that deals with our MLA salaries, and the motion is . . .

Mr. Mason: Yes, and this is to set a precedent, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry.

The Chair: I listened very carefully to your five-minute soliloquy. Now please listen for 30 seconds to mine.

I'm trying to keep this discussion relevant to the point that has been raised in this motion, and I would really appreciate it if you would do the same.

Now, your wrap-up comments, please.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I think that we should oppose this motion not because MLA salaries aren't already very high – they are; they're most generous – but because of the political context, and that is to say that this motion is intended to set the stage for freezes or rollbacks on the wages of other individuals. That is why I am opposing it.

11:20

Ms Smith: Since Mr. Mason does not seem to feel that he needs to take it back to his caucus for further discussion, it sounds to me like the committee's will is to move forward and either vote this up or down. With that in mind, I would like to propose an amendment. What I would like to propose is eliminating the words "and ending March 31, 2014". So the motion would read: "There

shall be no increase to the salaries and allowances in those orders for the fiscal year commencing April 1." There are a couple of other words I'd need to remove. "No increase to the salaries and allowances in those orders commencing April 1, 2013." That would mean I'm proposing an amendment that would eliminate "for the fiscal year" and also eliminate "and ending March 31, 2014".

I think it's pretty clear that the situation that we're in right now in this province from a financial point of view under this Premier is not going to be resolved within one year. I think that that is the indication, that we're getting a very strong signal of that. If the government is relying on resource revenues to bail us out, relying on us being able to build pipelines to get our product to market so we can get full value, whether it's for WTI or Brent, we're not going to get pipelines built in this province for three to five years. Let's be frank about that.

Even if Keystone was approved today, it would take years to get built. Even if Gateway was approved today, it would take years to get built. Even if the east coast pipeline, which I'm a big supporter of, manages to get through all the regulatory hurdles today, it's not going to be built for three to five years. What we're facing, then, is a structural deficit that we are going to have to live with for the foreseeable future until such time as we can get full market value for our resources.

With that in mind, I think we need to send a signal of austerity from this committee. Mr. Mason is quite right. You can't ask your front-line workers to take a rollback if you are increasing your own wages. I mean, the Premier, although she didn't want to intervene on this decision, approved the decision to increase MLA pay by 8 per cent. I would have liked to have seen her take some leadership on that front rather than increasing MLA pay by 8 per cent and then going to the doctors and the teachers and other front-line workers and saying that now is their time to tighten the belt.

This is a motion that's a little too little but not too late to have an impact. With that in mind, I think we have to recognize the fiscal realities, and the fiscal realities are that this is not going to be a short-term problem. This is going to be, from what I've seen of the budget documents, of the website that's been produced, a long-term problem, a structural problem.

Having an open-ended motion so that we will not have automatic pay increases this year and we would only return to having the automatic increases by a motion of this committee once we're in a position to be able to do that: I think that that would be a more prudent motion. I would ask the members of the committee to support the amendment to eliminate "for the fiscal year" and eliminate "and ending March 31, 2014" so that we will not see any further increase to the salaries and allowances for MLAs until this fiscal crisis is at an end.

The Chair: Thank you.

So there are, really, two sections of Mr. Young's motion that you would suggest be amended. The first is to strike out the words "for the fiscal year."

Ms Smith: Correct.

The Chair: The second would be to strike out the words "and ending March 31, 2014."

Ms Smith: Correct.

The Chair: Okay. Please be reminded that while we become part of a three-year government business plan, the tradition and history

is that we only approve budgets one year at a time legally, technically, strictly speaking. At least, that's my understanding.

That having been said, though, we have an amendment on the floor, as clarified here. I will go to speakers to the amendment, starting with Mr. Dorward, followed by Mr. Quest.

Mr. Dorward: Well, I simply wanted to know if the mover of the motion accepts the amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Young, you are the mover of the motion. Mr. Dorward is asking you for a comment on it. You can comment now, or I can go to Mr. Quest and come back to you.

Mr. Young: Well, I thought you said it very well. It's prudent to do. I mean, we're not accepting any kind of increase. Come next year, we will make the appropriate decision and assessments on whether it's appropriate at that point. I don't have a crystal ball unlike other members who profess to. I'm not going to make any promises. I'm doing the right thing now, and the right thing now is to take no increase.

The Chair: Thank you.

I might add that if the motion were to succeed in its original form, I think this would be the third or the fourth year in a row that we have frozen MLA salaries.

Mrs. Scarlett, what is the exact, correct statement here?

Mrs. Scarlett: With the exception of the adjustment in salary that was made at the time of this last election, that we've just talked about here, these salaries previous to that have been frozen.

The Chair: So if this motion were to succeed in its original form – we'll come back to the amendment in a second; I just want to be clear on Mr. Young's point and Mr. Dorward's question – if this motion succeeded to freeze MLA salaries for 2013-14, that would be the fourth year in a row that MLA salaries would be frozen under the guidance of the CPI formula or whatever its predecessor was.

Mrs. Scarlett: For clarification, prior to the adjustment that took place as of April 23, 2012, it is my recollection that salaries were frozen for I believe four years previous. The adjustment then was made effective as of April 23, 2012, and now what is being discussed is freezing that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Now, I was with Dorward, and then I went over to Mr. Young for an answer to Dorward. Now I'm at Quest.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to follow up on what Mr. Young was saying and actually your comments also, you know, we budget one year at a time. We actually don't even know what this budget is going to look like although we have a pretty good idea, so this is a decision that we need to make. But these decisions need to line up with, I think, the same periods that our budgets are, which are annual.

I just want to clarify after Ms Smith's comments. This has come up over and over, this 8 per cent increase. Just to clarify one more time for the committee and others in the room, there was a long process over several months to deal with this. There was a beginning timeline before the election, and there was an end timeline some months ago. The opposition has very conveniently picked a spot during that timeline in the middle as a baseline and stated over and over again that there's been an 8 per cent increase.

You go to the beginning of the timeline of the process and the end of the timeline, and the net result very clearly is that MLAs took an 8 per cent decrease over that period. I think we need to clarify that again for this committee and others. That's what happened.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Well, while we're clarifying, I think it's important to remember that the first act of the new Premier when he was elected in 2008 was to actually approve an additional stipend for committee pay, which was a significant pay increase of \$3,500 per month. If we want to go back through history, I don't know that the public looks at MLAs as being hard done by on the issue of compensation because the amount that MLAs were increased was significant, but it was done through a different mechanism. To freeze a portion of their income but not, then, acknowledge that there was a massive amount of additional income that was paid for through those committees I think is not quite reflective of what happened historically.

Also, on Mr. Quest's point about the pay increase let's be clear. Anyone who was elected prior to April 23 is still getting the transition allowance. Some members, including some members of this committee, stand to get significant amounts of dollars in those transition allowances. Those members elected prior to April 23 did not actually take a significant pay increase. They still are preserved in their substantial transition allowance payouts. Those of us who were elected after April 23 knew what we were getting paid for eight months leading up to this committee. In December we knew that we were getting paid in combination the \$134,000 plus the \$11,485 from the RRSP allowance. We knew what our salary was for eight months prior to the decision being made in December of last year. The decision made in December of last year increased our pay by 8 per cent.

I suppose you can maybe argue semantics, that if I had been elected prior to April 23 and had not received the transition allowance, what was then decided in December would have been less than what I would have been paid before even though I wasn't elected. It's a little convoluted logic for me. All I know is that our MLAs were paid a certain amount for eight months, and then they got a pay increase in December. Those MLAs who were elected prior to April 23 did not take a pay cut. They still get to walk away with their substantial transition allowances. So we're just clarifying the record.

That being said, I still think it's important for us to make the point that this is not going to be a short-term problem. I think we can leave this open ended. I think we should leave this open ended. I think that it would recognize, especially since we're going into negotiations with public-sector unions – we are asking them to sign multiyear agreements. It's not unusual for the government to make decisions that extend out from a multiyear basis. If we are sending the message that as MLAs we are prepared to freeze our salaries for multiple years, until we get out of this financial crisis, and we would hope that in the spirit of co-operation they would consider doing something similar so that we can get through to a point where we're back in a balanced budget, I think we'd have more credibility if we left this open ended, which is why I would ask the members of the committee to support it. That being said, I think they would have had a lot more credibility in negotiating with their unions if they hadn't increased the pay by 8 per cent in December.

Thank you.

11:30

The Chair: Hon. members, we've been around this a little bit before, and our Clerk has actually prepared a summary sheet for purposes of clarification, since it has come up, which clarifies what the member total compensation comparisons are across the board.

It shows, as you probably know, 16 jurisdictions in Canada, which include the House of Commons, the Senate, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut, and all the provinces. Alberta actually comes in in the eighth spot. The highest compensation is for the House of Commons; that's \$227,764 per year. The lowest is Prince Edward Island at \$99,977. Alberta is in the middle of the pack, ranking number 8, at \$156,311.

For purposes of clarification the Clerk has prepared that comparison, and I think he's prepared to circulate it. Hopefully, that will end that matter, and we can move on with what we're really talking about here today, and that's freezing the salaries for MLAs.

That being said, I have Mr. Dorward, and that's the end of my speaking list.

Mr. Dorward: Well, I would take some direction from you, Mr. Chair, because I do have some comments about whether there was an MLA pay increase or an MLA pay decrease. You've allowed some discussion on that, and I would take some direction from you as to whether you wanted me to carry on that dialogue or do that later.

The Chair: Well, I'm hoping we've clarified some of that already. I mean, we're not going to get into the semantics of this again, please. There's stuff that was paid out before the election, and then there's stuff that was paid out after it. We chose to break that into two different components, and some people have taken some liberties with how they've explained it. I prefer that we just move on. It's a no-win argument because there are two different versions of that, Mr. Dorward.

Let me go to Mr. Mason on the amendment, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think that Ms Smith's amendment, which is to take the one-year freeze proposed by the Conservatives and make it permanent, is not something I can support. This is an example, in my view, of one-downmanship. It's part of the race to the bottom that's being led by the PCs and the Wildrose.

As I have said repeatedly, I don't think there's any need for any increase in MLA compensation. It's more than generous. That's not my point. My point is that this is symbolic of what is to come for the province's doctors, for the province's nurses and teachers and provincial employees. It is a choice about who will bear the burden of this PC government's incompetent financial management of the province. They clearly are not going to make the corporations and the wealthy bear any more burden than they already are, which is minimal, but they are going to make the ordinary working people of this province pay the price. That's not something we're going to support.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Smith has moved an amendment to Mr. Young's motion dated February 7, 2013, and her amendment says that the words "for the fiscal year" be stricken and the words "and ending March 31, 2014," be stricken such that the total amendment would read:

Notwithstanding section 2 of the members' committee allowances order, section 1.1 of the Executive Council salaries

order, and section 4.1 of the members' allowances order there shall be no increase to the salaries and allowances in those orders commencing April 1, 2013.

Are we ready for the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called. Those in favour of Ms Smith's amendment, please say aye.

Ms Smith: I think Mr. Mason wants a recorded vote, and I do, too.

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested. Those in favour of the amendment, please state your names now, beginning with Ms Smith.

Ms Smith: Danielle Smith.

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth.

The Chair: Those opposed to the amendment, please say no, starting with Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: No.

Mr. Quest: No.

Mrs. Jablonski: No.

Mr. Goudreau: No.

Mr. Dorward: No.

Mr. Mason: No.

The Chair: Thank you. The noes carry the day.

We're back to the original motion. Are there any other speakers to the original motion?

Mrs. Forsyth: I just have a question if I can, Mr. Speaker, for clarification, please. The first thing I'd like to know is: through Mr. Young's motion, which I will support, what is the total cost savings on this in dollars?

The Chair: Mrs. Forsyth, your question is actually directed at the CPI allowance because any increase to MLA pay under what this motion covers is tied to what the CPI, the consumer price index, increase would be for the year. I don't have it off the top of my head, but a year or two ago, as I recall, it was 2.4 per cent, and perhaps a year ago it was something like 1.2 per cent or thereabouts. I'm sure I'm quite close. But I'm going to get the Clerk to just clarify what the CPI might be projected to be. It's determined at December 31, and I don't even know if we have it all just yet.

Let me go to Dr. McNeil for some clarification here.

Dr. McNeil: We do. If the CPI was applied to these various salaries, the increase would be 1.12 per cent.

Mrs. Forsyth: What is that in a dollar value, then, David, please, if we're talking about 87 MLAs not accepting this? I think it's important to know.

Dr. McNeil: Well, just in terms of the MLA salary, it would be about \$131,000.

Mrs. Forsyth: That would be the cost savings by Mr. Young's motion?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. In terms of just the MLAs' salaries, not applying it to the other cabinet salaries and so on. Just in terms of our budget it would be at minimum \$131,000. That's off the top of my head. I haven't done a detailed calculation.

Mrs. Forsyth: Maybe Steve can clarify. Are we just talking about the base of the MLAs' salaries? Are we talking about the increase that the cabinet ministers get, et cetera, in his particular motion?

Mr. Young: First of all, thank you very much for your support. Kind of like e-mails not sent, this is money not received, so it's not necessarily a savings. Zero per cent is zero per cent. It applies very specifically in the motion to what are the sections. It's just the LAO portion.

Mrs. Jablonski: It's the Executive Council, too.

Mr. Young: Sorry. It references the Executive Council salaries, too.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may – and you're right, we're talking zero to zero. Let's pretend we don't have this motion and we're all going to get the cost increase. When you get a cost increase, does it include the MLAs' salaries plus what the cabinet would get?

Mr. Young: It includes Executive Council salaries as well.

Mrs. Forsyth: This motion includes the Executive Council's salaries plus the MLAs'?

Mr. Young: It's "section 1.1 of the Executive Council salaries order, and section 4.1 of the members' allowances order," so it includes both the Executive Council and members' allowances. It covers both of those.

Mrs. Forsyth: So the 1.12 per cent that Dr. McNeil referred to of \$131,000 is including the Executive Council salaries?

Mr. Young: No, it is not. That's just his calculation based on the MLAs' pay, not the Executive Council.

11:40

Dr. McNeil: The other allowances they're talking about are the Official Opposition House Leader, third party House leader, chief government whip, assistant government whip, chief opposition whip, assistant opposition whip, third party whip. None of those salaries would be adjusted by the 1.12 per cent as well, nor would the cabinet ministers' salaries, nor would the Premier's salary.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm assuming that if the government is serious about what they're tweeting about, that should also be included in this motion.

Dr. McNeil: Those are included in this motion.

The Chair: They are.

Mrs. Forsyth: They are? Okay. That's all I needed to know. Thank you.

The Chair: Yeah. Let's be really clear here, folks. We're talking about the Members' Services Committee order as it exists on page 19, which is tied in with the motion that refers to section 1.1. It says: Executive Council in the case of the Premier, also known as president of the Executive Council, and in the case of a member designated otherwise than as a minister without portfolio, and in the case of a member designated as a minister without portfolio. And the amounts are given there.

Secondly, you have to also look at section 4.1. It talks about allowances outlined in aforementioned sections being increased or decreased, and it includes everything that David has just mentioned: Opposition House Leader, third party House leader, chief government whip, assistant government whip, chief opposition whip, assistant opposition whip, third party whip. So it's the gamut of both members' salaries and what we refer to as allowances. All of that would be trimmed, and that would come to far more than \$131,000 when all of it is put on the table. David, is that right? We're flying here without the benefit of a calculator, and so on.

Dr. McNeil: I have a calculator. I just haven't applied it yet.

The Chair: In round numbers what is it?

Dr. McNeil: If I estimated, I would estimate it to be around \$200,000, but that's just off the top of my head. Now, you've got 19 cabinet ministers at that salary, and you've got one premier at her salary. You've got six, well, in effect ministers without portfolio, who are paid as associate ministers, paid that salary. I mean, I can do a quick calculation here if you want me to come up with that number. That's my ballpark.

The Chair: I think, Mrs. Forsyth, your question was: what is the ballpark savings or cost increase avoidance? It's in the neighbourhood of \$200,000, give or take. I hope that's sufficient and we can move on.

Now, Mr. Young, you had another point you wanted to raise?

Mr. Young: No. I appreciate Dr. McNeil clarifying that.

The Chair: Ms Smith, and then maybe we can have a question on this motion.

Ms Smith: Actually, I'd like to propose another amendment.

Just to Mr. Young's point about e-mails, I would have e-mailed you, but we are trying to correspond on two other issues that I haven't heard back from you on yet, so I'd be delighted to hear about those two other issues that I've raised with you. If you would be prepared to respond to me on those, that would be terrific.

The other amendment that I would put forward, then, is to amend the ending in deference to Mr. Mason's point about it being open ended: replace "and ending March 31, 2014," with "and ending when the consolidated budget is in balance." I think that, once again, gets to the issue that we're trying to raise, that this is not going to be a short-term crisis that we're dealing with, based on some of the things that I've heard the government say, based on the indication, it seems to be, that they're still waiting for the building of pipelines to bail us out of this problem with an increase in revenues. I think we need to be quite clear that the MLAs are not going to be receiving pay increases until such time as the budget is in balance.

If it is the case that the government does take measures that get us into balance sooner than I think they're going to, I will be one of the first to applaud them because we think that that was the promise that they made during the election, that they were going to be able to do all of their spending promises within the context of a balanced budget, without tax increases, and without going into debt.

I would say once again, then, the amendment:
and ending when the consolidated budget is in balance.

I would hope that the members of the committee would also sign on to that and support the motion. I think that it does send a strong message, that we're prepared to take the first step. I think it does show leadership, and I think that it would be welcome from the perspective of the public, understanding that we see that this is going to be a very serious issue we have to deal with not just for this budget year but beyond.

The Chair: Thank you.

The thrust of the second amendment by Ms Smith is very similar to the thrust of the first one but has slightly different words here tied to the issue of balancing the consolidated budget. My understanding is that Ms Smith's amendment is to delete from Mr. Young's motion the words "March 31, 2014" and substitute the words "when the consolidated budget is balanced." I have Ms Smith indicating a head shake in the affirmative, so that is the amendment.

Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called. Those in favour of Ms Smith's second amendment, which I've just clarified, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Accordingly, the noes have it.

Ms Smith: Can I get that recorded?

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested. Those in favour of Ms Smith's motion, please indicate your names now, starting with Ms Smith.

Ms Smith: Danielle Smith.

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth.

The Chair: Those opposed to Ms Smith's second motion of amendment, please indicate by saying no and your name.

Mr. Young: No.

Mr. Quest: No.

Mrs. Jablonski: No.

Mr. Goudreau: No.

Mr. Dorward: No.

Mr. Mason: No.

The Chair: I think we have six noes and two yeses, so that second amendment is defeated.

Now, are you ready for the question on the main motion?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called. Those in favour of Mr. Young's motion, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no.

Ms Smith: Can we get a recorded vote on that, please?

The Chair: Thank you. We're going to get a recorded vote here. Those in favour of Mr. Young's motion, please indicate your name, starting with Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: Steve Young.

Mr. Quest: Yes.

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes.

Mr. Goudreau: Yes.

Mr. Dorward: Yes.

Ms Smith: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Those opposed to the motion, please state your names now.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason.

The Chair: Thank you. We have that motion carried and succeeded.

Okay. Let me move on now to the next item of business.

Mrs. Jablonski, you had a question before we go on?

Mrs. Jablonski: I just want to point out, Mr. Chair, how important it is that we do end this meeting at 12 o'clock. I would just like say that I'm very proud that I've been appointed as co-chair of the Interagency Council on Homelessness, and I have to hurry to that meeting, for which I am already late.

The Chair: The chair has already indicated that we have to adjourn right around 12 o'clock because a number of other members have also indicated commitments elsewhere.

We'll move on.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Chair, before we move on, we still haven't addressed the issue of the Premier usurping the process of the independence of this committee. Do we then as Wildrose caucus write you a letter asking you to investigate a point of privilege?

The Chair: Not necessary, Mrs. Forsyth. Mr. Mason has already indicated that he's raised a point of privilege. It's on the record, and we will deal with that. It will have to come back here. I will take some time, obviously, to consider what the processes are. I'm not familiar with a point of privilege at the committee level, but there is guidance on how to proceed with that. I'm going to take the time to have a look at that so that I thoroughly understand it, and then I'll come back to the committee with the process that should be followed because it actually is the responsibility of this committee to consider it first.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right. If I may, we want it on the record that you'll be receiving a letter from the Wildrose also.

The Chair: As you wish.

Now, let us move on.

Mr. Mason: Just on that, I would appreciate the opportunity to conduct the necessary research into precedents and provide that to you in writing if you can take that into account.

The Chair: Absolutely. Understood. Your point of privilege has been noted, and it is in order at the committee level. I'm just saying that we don't have all of the backup information here right now to proceed with it, but there is a procedure outlined within our guidelines. We just have to dig it up and then proceed accordingly.

Ms Smith: If you wouldn't mind giving some direction to the committee about how Mr. Young is to proceed on his subsequent motions, and I'm assuming there's more than one. It's quite clear we're not going to have time today to be able to debate them thoroughly. As Dr. Sherman did in the last meeting, I would like him to read them into the record so that we do have the opportunity to take it back for caucus discussion.

11:50

The Chair: I don't know the motions, and I haven't seen the motions either.

Let me go to Mr. Young. We're on the next point of business. Everyone is assuming that you have a motion, but I don't know that you do, so why don't you take the floor and talk about item 5(c), temporary residence allowances?

Mr. Young: Perhaps I should have tweeted before the meeting to give somebody more indication, but I'll just read it here. While not a requirement, certainly I think given the time and the nature of discussing these issues, I'll just frame the context, and then I have a motion that I think can go back for the caucuses to consider. There will be some research as well with the LAO because we don't want to have any unintended consequences.

The Chair: So let me be clear. We'll do essentially what we allowed Dr. Sherman to do at a previous meeting, and that was to frame the issue and then read into the record the motion but not debate it today and not decide it today. Is that clear?

Mr. Young: Yeah.

The Chair: Everybody agree with that process? I've heard no one to the contrary, so you have the approval to proceed on that basis.

Mr. Young: Okay. Basically, there are two issues. One is the temporary residence. What we're proposing in my proposal here is that a cap be instituted for allowances under section 6 of the members' allowances order and under section 3 of the members' committee allowances order in order to have a total amount of \$1,930 per month regardless of whether the Assembly is sitting or otherwise, just to bring clarification around those allowances for the members who are living outside the distance of 60 kilometres from the Legislature.

The other issue. When a member is required to travel more than 60 kilometres from their primary residence for the purpose of carrying out duties as a member, the member may claim expenses for travel. These are reimbursable consistent with the public-sector travel directive. A member is not eligible to be reimbursed for any expenses that the member is otherwise able to be reimbursed for under any other provisions.

In a sense there are two categories for which a member outside the 60-kilometre area is afforded some expense compensation for their residence, and it seems confusing to me in terms of session, in and out of session. What I'm proposing is that the in-session amount be essentially eliminated or frozen or reduced down to zero and simply be a cap of \$1,930 for people who are required to travel those distances. That's the maximum amount that anybody can claim for an allowance. Many members have rented places or made other accommodations to support delivering their services here, and I think that's a reasonable amount. I just think that that clarifies that amount.

If I may read the motion now just to clarify the direction for discussion.

The Chair: Do you have it ready for circulation as well? We have Mrs. Forsyth on teleconference, and we'd like to get her a copy of it.

Is there anyone else on teleconference from the committee? No.

Mr. Young: Given that it's not going to be voted on or discussed, can I just read it, and then we will be sure we get it to Mrs. Forsyth?

The Chair: Understood. Yeah. Go ahead. Read away.

Mr. Young: Okay. I move that the Members' Services Committee direct the Legislative Assembly Office staff to prepare draft orders for the committee to review that incorporate the recommendations as outlined in the document [that I just discussed] entitled Proposal To Amend Members' Services Committee Orders, circulated at the February 7, 2013, meeting.

I have that proposal here as well. I just read what that is, and that is to cap and to recognize – what's the proper word? – any travel accommodations that are consistent with travelling many distances to do MLA business. If I sum up, getting rid of that in session and out of session – it's very confusing, so we need to reconcile that and clarify that.

The Chair: But let's be clear. You're not talking about travel here. You're talking about temporary residence. You said the word "travel" inadvertently perhaps.

Mr. Young: There's the second part.

The Chair: I know. We're not there yet. We're dealing with your motion under item 5(c), which you've now read into the record. We've agreed there will be no debate or discussion on it today. Everybody has a copy of that.

Now let's move on to item 5(d).

Ms Smith: Before we do, I just need to understand because we received a form today about this committee allowance. I'm just wondering if your motion does include the fact that there – we're not in session, but we are meeting in committee. I'm just wondering if there's something missing from your motion.

Mr. Young: I can clarify that. That's a very good point because we're here when in session, not in session, in committee, and I challenge you to explain that because I've had a lot of struggles to do that. Clearly, we need to have a capped amount, and we're doing a lot of work. We're in lots of committees, lots of sessions. We're here for other kinds of caucus meetings and the like, so whatever that is, it needs to have a cap. That form there is basically to acknowledge that you're here for a committee. That's tied to the \$1,930, and we're saying that you get \$1,930 a month regardless of what you do or what have you.

Mrs. Jablonski: How often we're here.

The Chair: Right.

And LAO staff are available for providing any clarification.

In the meantime your motion is in written form, Mr. Young, is it?

Mr. Young: Yes.

The Chair: Could you please give the chair a copy of it and make sure that everyone else who is on the committee receives a copy? Or we can distribute it or whatever. We're not debating it today. We're not deciding it today. We're looking at four more minutes

of time here, and I want to move to your last item unless there's some pressing issue tied to 5(c).

Ms Smith: Does the point I raise get addressed in your motion, or does it have to be modified?

Mr. Young: It is addressed. Yes, it is. It's in there. I invite you to do your own research, and if you can explain it better than any one of us – it's difficult.

Ms Smith: I just want to be able to explain it to our caucus, so I just wanted to understand what you were getting at.

The Chair: Do we have general agreement now, then, that we can move on to item 5(d) and proceed in the same way? Mr. Young, if you have a comment on 5(d). I don't know if you have a motion here as well or not.

Mr. Young: It's actually the exact same motion, but I want to set the stage for that motion. It's for the LAO to look at it under that proposal.

The Chair: Again, there will be no debate today, and there will be no decision today. Agreed?

Mr. Young: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. So proceed quickly, Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: Again, this is the proposal to basically direct the LAO because we don't want to have unintended consequences. There's overlapping legislation and stuff. We need to take the time.

When a Member is required to travel more than 60 kilometres from their primary residence for the purpose of

carrying out the Member's duties as a Member, the Member may claim expenses for travel (meals and accommodation) that are reimbursable under the public sector travel directives.

A Member is not eligible to be reimbursed for any expenses that otherwise the Member is able to be reimbursed for under any other provisions in the Members' Services Committee orders.

There's an associated motion, and I'll read it here again.

... to move that the Members' Services Committee direct the Legislative Assembly Office staff to prepare draft orders for the committee to review that incorporate the recommendations ... which I've just discussed, for the next Members' Services Committee meeting.

The Chair: Okay. I think we understand that. So the intent here of both of your motions, 5(c) and 5(d), is to have the LAO prepare some background information on this and then work with Parliamentary Counsel and presumably yourself to get the wording that might or might not be necessary to put that into effect. Then it will come here for debate and discussion and decision. Is that correct?

Mr. Young: Correct.

The Chair: Okay.

That having been said, is there any other new business in the one minute remaining? No?

All right. A motion to adjourn, then, from Mrs. Jablonski. Those in favour of adjournment, please say aye. Any opposed? Seeing none, the meeting is adjourned right at 12 noon, and the next meeting, as the agenda says, will be at the call of the chair. Thank you all for your attendance and participation.

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

