



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Tuesday, December 9, 2014
8 a.m.

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Third Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC), Deputy Chair

Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
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* substitution for Heather Forsyth

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8 a.m. Tuesday, December 9, 2014

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. It's 8 a.m., and I'd like to get this meeting under way if I could, please.

Welcome, everyone. I believe we have a quorum, but let's start with a quick roll call just to make sure that we are correct in the quorum number that we require. Let's start with Mrs. Fritz signing in, please. We'll do the people who are present.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you very much. Good morning, everyone. It's Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross.

Mr. VanderBurg: George VanderBurg, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. Hale: Jason Hale, Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Smith: Danielle Smith, Highwood.

The Chair: Other members?

Mr. Griffiths: Doug Griffiths, MLA, Battle River-Wainwright

Mr. McDonald: Everett McDonald, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Ms L. Johnson: Linda Johnson, Calgary-Glenmore.

The Chair: Thank you. That's it, plus myself, Gene Zwozdesky, and we may have some people joining us by teleconference. Do we have anybody on teleconference? No? That's it? All right. Well, there may be others who'll join us very shortly.

Thank you very much for coming together for this important meeting to essentially discuss our budget and a few other items. I have nothing under housekeeping, so we can move straight on and just indicate who the substitutions are today.

Ms Smith, would you like to sign in in that respect?

Ms Smith: I'm substituting for Heather Forsyth.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other subs?

Hearing none, okay. Of course, there are other MLAs that are likely joining us either here in person or joining us by listening in. All MLAs are welcome to participate; however, they cannot vote, and they cannot move motions. So let's be clear on that and move on.

Everybody has the agenda that was circulated. Is there a motion I could have from someone to approve the agenda as circulated for today? So moved by Mrs. Yvonne Fritz. We don't normally get involved in a very large way here, but we'll take a seconder. Mr. Griffiths. Thank you. Everybody in favour? Are there any opposed? That is carried. We can move on.

You have before you the minutes from the December 10 meeting, which was called for essentially the same purpose. I'm assuming you've had a chance to look at those minutes, and that being said, I would look for a motion to adopt those minutes from December 10, 2013. Moved by Mrs. Fritz. We don't need a seconder. Is everybody in favour? Is anybody opposed? That is carried, and those minutes are thereby approved.

Hon. members, we have four items under new business. The largest item by far, obviously, is going to be the Legislative Assembly budget estimates. We did our best to get these binders to you last week, and I think that everybody had them one way or another on December 4. I want to thank our staff for working very

hard and very quickly to get that out to everybody. So we're going to get into discussing that.

I would draw your attention to the binders, and we're going to plow right in under the first tab, which is the overview. These couple of pages of overview essentially tell you what it is that we are bound by, so to speak, in terms of the estimates, but let's remember that these are estimates. In the first bullet we're talking about the LAO branch budgets. We have a number of branches, and we have representatives here from those branches, and I'd like them to be introduced now, starting with Dr. McNeil who heads up as Clerk.

Dr. McNeil: David McNeil, Clerk of the Assembly.

Mrs. Alenius: Bev Alenius, Speaker's office.

Mrs. Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, director of human resource services, information technology and broadcast services.

Mr. Ellis: Scott Ellis, director of financial management, administrative services.

Mr. Joy: Darren Joy, manager of financial services.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations.

Ms Quast: Allison Quast, executive assistant to the Clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

We also have some staff joining us. Let's start over here with Shannon Dean.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel, director of House services.

Mr. Chapman: Al Chapman, manager of visitor services.

Mr. Hodgson: Brian Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms and director of visitor, ceremonial, and security services.

The Chair: We have some staff there, Val and others.

Ms Footz: Val Footz, Legislature librarian.

Ms Tilley: Jillian Tilley, manager of IT operations.

The Chair: Kyla Rodgers from Brian's office. Anyone else there?

Ms Rutherford: Val Rutherford, manager of IT planning and development.

Ms Tischer: Lyndsay Tischer, manager of human resources.

The Chair: Thank you. I think that's pretty much everyone.

Under the LAO branch budgets, as you look at this, we basically have two categories. We have management, and then we have opted-out or excluded nonmanagement employees from the Alberta public service. Consistent with what's applied to them, LAO branch compensation rates are going to be adjusted, with your approval, by 3 per cent max. In other words, that's up to 3 per cent for eligible in-range merit adjustments and by 2.25 per cent for market adjustments. That is the first issue to talk about quickly. Are there any questions with regard to the first bullet?

If not, let's move on to the second bullet and get the overall view here. Staff benefits and any of the adjustments for the employer portion of health benefits and pension plan costs and mandatory contributions are obviously reflected in our branch

budgets. You can see there that the costs for staff covered in this area include things like the employer contribution for long-term disability insurance; group life insurance; accidental death and dismemberment insurance; prescription, extended health, and dental premiums; management and nonmanagement pension plans; and premiums for CPP, EI, and WCB. Any questions on the second bullet? Thank you. Let's move on, then.

There's a 2 per cent increase identified as a general inflationary factor for budgeted operational costs. When we get to that in the detailed budget, you'll understand that we're talking about the operating costs here only. This is arrived at by blending two projections from two different sources. The first one is from the provincial outlook and the Conference Board of Canada, and the citation is there. That's a 1.9 per cent increase blended with the 2.5 per cent change in Alberta's CPP, the figures brought to us by Alberta Treasury Board. We blended the two together, as you can see, and came out with the 2 per cent general inflationary factor that will be applied here. I think it's important to note, as it says in the please note boldface area, that this blended rate is for general inflation, and it's applied to branch budgets "if warranted and not to exceed 2%." Any questions on the third bullet? Thank you.

Let's move on to the last bullet. We always have to take our best guess with respect to how many days a session will last. For purposes of this budget we're estimating 75 sessional days and an additional 81 committee meetings, which translates into 243 committee hours. In the asterisk you can see that 156 committee hours were estimated; however, for wage staff called in there is a minimum call of three hours. So even if a committee meeting only lasts an hour or two hours, the minimum call arrangement is to pay for three. Are there any questions on the fourth bullet? None? Thank you.

Let us move on to the quick overview of the MLA administration budget. The member indemnity for the 2015-16 budget will not increase per the MSC's amended remuneration orders. In other words, there's another MLA pay freeze, if that's the way you like to review it, which is advocated for here. It's all subject to discussion and your approval, of course. Any questions on that first bullet? Thank you. Let's move on, then.

All MLA benefit plans, including the individual retirement investment option and the MLA health benefit plan, are budgeted on actual rates with no anticipated increase for 2015. I think that's pretty self-explanatory, but if there are any questions, I'd entertain them. None? Thank you.

Let's move on to the third parameter under MLA administration budget. This is with respect to constituency office staff benefits. Adjustments for the employer portion of the health benefit and pension plan costs for constituency office staff are reflected. They are minimal, as you've seen, less than 1 per cent. Also, the budgeted amount provides for current and projected general illness leaves. Costs for constituency office staff covered in this area include such things as employer contributions for LTDI; group life insurance; accidental death and dismemberment insurance; prescription, extended health, and dental premiums; and so on, similar to what I read to you earlier. Are there any comments or questions on the third bullet under MLA administration? Thank you. We'll get into the details shortly.

8:10

The broad overview continues on the next page. Constituency budgets: if you want to add the word "office" in there, it might help to provide some clarity, so constituency office budgets. The member's services allowance formula is what we're working with here, and as you all know, there are four elements that are involved. The MSA constituency office element is described in

three different bullets. The office operations amount for both rural and urban is reflected under item 1, and we're hoping to apply the 2 per cent general inflation factor there. When we get into the actual staffing, the second bullet, this includes market increases of 2 per cent for 2014-15 and a 2.25 per cent increase for 2015-16; plus, there's an in-range merit adjustment of 3 per cent for employees. The third bullet is with respect to the supplies that are in the MSA orders. This includes an increase of 2 per cent for general inflation. Are there any questions on the MSA constituency office element overview? None?

We welcome Dr. Sherman. Do you want to sign in officially?

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other latecomers? No? Okay. Let's move on.

The second element is communications. Again, we're talking about constituency office budgets communications here. As most of you would know, postal rates have been increased for individually addressed mail to 85 cents per letter. When we do the budget, we multiply that: 85 cents per letter times two. Last year I think it was 65 cents, but Canada Post, almost immediately after we had made our budget deliberations, upped it to 85 cents. So there's a bit of a hit there for us that we have no control over. Any questions on the postal rate? Thank you.

Let's move on to item 3, the promotional element overview. This includes the aforementioned increase of 2 per cent for general inflation. It's applied to the promotional element base and use of the most recent estimated provincial population figures for 2015-16. Any questions or comments there?

Seeing none, let's move to the fourth item, the matrix element. This includes the aforementioned 2 per cent general inflation factor. It's applied to the funding amount for each range of the matrix score for the current Legislature that we are in. Any questions on item 4? No?

Let's move to the last part of the overview, then, in terms of parameters, caucus budgets. These include a blended adjustment of the 5.8 per cent to all components, which includes private members' allowance, committee support, and so on, that we'll be discussing in some detail shortly. That's a weighted average of both manpower, staffing in other words, and operational expense increases, and they are calculated as per the two bullets there: the manpower market increases of 2 per cent for 2014-15, the 2.25 per cent for 2015-16, and an in-range merit adjustment of 3 per cent. That's up to 3 per cent; right, Scott? Oh, no. It's applied straight out, and it's applied to the manpower component of the per member allowance. That's estimated to be about 70 per cent of the total allowance amount of the caucus budget.

The operating expense, which is bullet 2, of 2 per cent for general inflation is applied to the operational component of the per member allowance. That's estimated to be about 30 per cent of the per member allowance. As you all know, each caucus budget reflects the current number of private members in that caucus; in other words, everybody other than government is included in that reflection.

Special funding requirements is your last tab, tab 15, and we'll get into that. The overview simply stated here is that funding is requested for the expected costs to provide the necessary support and workspace functionality to all members, to LAO staff and operations here, and to caucuses in the newly renovated Edmonton federal building. This funding is being highlighted and segregated from our normal program budgets due to the amount of costs and the anticipated completion of this project during the fiscal year in question, which is 2015-16.

Any questions on special funding or caucus budget overview, remembering that we will get into the detailed discussion shortly? None. All right. Thank you.

Let us turn the page and go to tab 1. The estimates summary that is there before you reflects – let me start with the bottom line. If we could just go down to the bottom there, you'll see that the total change is approximately 4.69 per cent, and the rationale for it is what I've just explained in the overview.

I don't know if there are any highlights that you, Scott, or anyone else might want to go through here. The page is pretty self-explanatory. It gives the overall, big-picture view of our total budget.

Does anybody have any observations or comments with respect to any particular items that are reflected here?

Dr. McNeil: Just one item. Of that, let's say, 4.7 per cent increase, about a third of that, sort of 1.75 per cent of the increase, is just due to the fact that there are 13 more private members than there were the last time around, when we had a cabinet of 29 or 30. I think that's right. So a third of that increase of 4.7 per cent is due to the fact that we have significantly more private members, as it turns out, in the government caucus. A good portion of that, a third of that 4.7 per cent increase, comes from just the fact that we're funding more private members this time around than last time around.

The Chair: Thank you, David.

Everybody is clear on that point?

Mr. Lukaszuk has joined us. Would you like to sign in, please?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thomas Lukaszuk, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. Any questions on the overview page? None.

Then if you turn the page, you'll see just a handy summary for you. It's titled Proposal for MSC Consideration. Each tab is identified in accordance with the titles given, and those titles given are what is reflected under, essentially, item A of the sheet she just went through: financial management, human resources, office of the Speaker, legislative library, and so on. So if you're referring to something, please refer to it by tab number in case we're bouncing back and forth. We'll try and avoid doing that, but sometimes it is necessary.

Let us turn the page, then, and get into financial management and admin services, tab 1. This is the domain of Mr. Ellis, and I think we're joined by Jacquie. Do you want to sign in and tell us who you are and your title?

Ms Breault: Good morning. Jacqueline Breault, manager of corporate services with the financial management and administrative services branch.

The Chair: Working with Scott Ellis.

Mr. Ellis, do you have some highlights here that you want to talk to us about? On the left side of your binder is a little notation there. Perhaps you could start there.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Good morning. For financial management and administrative services in the 2015-16 budget there is an overall increase in expenditures of \$41,000, which equates to 2.55 per cent when compared to the approved budget for 2014-15.

Human resources expenses include an increase for market and merit adjustments as outlined by the Speaker in the budget parameters. The impact of these adjustments has been offset by

some staff replacements that occurred throughout the year whereby staff came in at lower salary levels than what outgoing staff were at. Also, the application of the merit increase was not applied to all staff because some were at the maximum in their range.

Operational expenses have decreased by a thousand dollars, or 2.8 per cent, to reflect actual cost reduction in our telecommunications. That would cover such things as phone lines, BlackBerry plan toll charges, et cetera.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there any questions with regard to anything on tab 1?

If not, let us proceed on to tab 2, please. In tab 2 we have a couple of highlights on the left-hand side.

Cheryl Scarlett, would you mind taking us through that?

8:20

Mrs. Scarlett: Similar in concept to what Scott outlined for our human resource services, the overall increase of our budget is \$121,000. The breakdown of that in terms of the human resources, or the manpower portion of it, is reflected in terms of \$81,000, which is a \$62,000 increase as a result of the cost-of-living adjustments applied to the actual salaries plus, again, in-range adjustments to those who are not already at maximum and, again based on that, the proportionate increase in terms of benefits costs.

On the operational expenses there is an additional \$9,000 being asked for under the advertising budget. This is directly related to recruitment. Costs of advertising have gone up. As well, we're anticipating with our move to the federal building that we'll be doing some targeted recruitment relative to visitor services in our committees area. So that's \$9,000 more being asked for there.

As well, you'll notice that there's \$30,000 more under labour, and that is in anticipation of our pre-election planning, that is planned for in this budget cycle. A lot of work needs to happen in preparation for the election in 2016, so that's that \$30,000 for staff.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any questions to Mrs. Scarlett with respect to tab 2?

If not, then let us move on. Again, if necessary we can come back, but I do want to get through all of this, so thank you for allowing us to move forward. It's pretty straightforward so far.

Tab 3 is the Speaker's office, and if you look at the branch highlight on the left-hand side, it would show you that there's an overall decrease in expenditures for the Speaker's office of about a thousand dollars, or 0.17 per cent, from what we had last year. Human resource expenses include the increase for market and merit adjustments outlined in the budget parameters. The impact of these adjustments has been offset by staff replacement at lower rates of pay, by staff not being entitled to receive the merit increase, no increase in member pay, and, also, reduced actual employer contributions.

To put this in a slightly different way, we've had some staffing changes in my office. Some people have moved on. They were at a higher level of pay. We were able to hire at a lower level of pay some replacements, so to speak. So we're in pretty good shape that way.

Are there any questions with regard to the office of the Speaker?

If not, let us move on to tab 4, which is our Legislative library estimates. We do have Val Footz here.

Val, do you want to take a spot by your microphone just in case there are any questions?

While you're getting there, I would direct people to the left-hand side of the binder under tab 4, where some of the budget highlights are included.

Val, if you'd be kind enough to just take us through the highlights, that would be helpful.

Ms Footz: Certainly. We are asking for an overall increase of \$127,000, and that is strictly for the human resource expenses for the market increase and merit adjustments as per the budget parameters.

Operational expenses we are keeping at a zero increase even though there are some line increases, especially in periodicals and newspapers. Subscription prices keep rising, and we want to make sure that you have all the information that you need. So we are offsetting that by decreasing in office equipment, telecommunications, and supplies.

The Chair: Also, under earnings, the first one, you have some people who were working part-time or some that had left for maternity leave, and they're coming back now.

Ms Footz: Yes. We had two staff that were working part-time hours, and now they are working five days a week, so it's really helping.

The Chair: Okay. Any questions to Val Footz regarding library projections? No? Thank you.

Let us move on to tab 5, then, please. Tab 5 is House services. I know that David McNeil might have a few comments to make for us here, and then we'll perhaps invite Brian Hodgson in as well.

Tab 5 on the left-hand side, if you would, David, please.

Dr. McNeil: Yes. Now, House services includes a lot of different areas of the Legislative Assembly Office: the Clerk's office, communications and broadcasting, House and committee services, legal services, interparliamentary relations, security and ceremonial services, and *Alberta Hansard*. You'll note here that we're asking for a significant increase, 13.43 per cent, over a million dollars. Besides the market and merit adjustments, a significant portion of that increase relates to funding to support the enhanced security situation in the Assembly, the Legislature Building, and the Annex. Brian can get into that in more detail.

Also, because of our move to the federal building and the sort of increase in space and functionality that we'll have in the federal building, we're going to need additional support for activities in the committees area. Instead of the two committee rooms that we have here, we're going to have four, and we expect quite a bit of increased activity related to committees.

Broadcasting capabilities. Now we broadcast the House operations. In the federal building we'll be able to be in a position to broadcast committee operations as well. So there are small additional staff resources required in committees, in broadcasting, and in communications, again related to much-increased activity in the federal building. Brian and Al can go into that in much more detail.

Operational expenses increase \$107,000 for equipment related to enhanced security – Brian can get into that in more depth – as well as \$21,000 in office administration and \$8,000 in books.

We've also decreased the travel related to member professional development and small reductions in freight and hosting expenses.

So that's the overview of House services, but there a lot of, you know, details in there that you may wish to explore and that Brian may wish to elaborate on, especially in relation to the security.

The Chair: Just before we go to Brian Hodgson, George VanderBurg had a question.

Mr. VanderBurg: What portion of this budget will be used to ensure that Albertans get to use the front door of the Legislature?

The Chair: Well, that's an Infrastructure question, but we . . .

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I saw "equipment" and "enhanced security measures."

The Chair: Yeah. We'll get Brian to comment, insofar as you're able, with respect to the security protocols.

Mr. Hodgson: The security envelope here is managed jointly by the sheriffs and the Legislative Assembly security service through the Security Coordination Committee. In the professional view of the security experts, entry through the front door is less than ideal as it is currently configured. We believe that to effectively deal with any potential threat, the current interim arrangements will work the best.

Part of what I do as the director of visitor services is to encourage visitors to come here and market this place as both a tourist destination and a place where Albertans should come and watch public policy in its development. I'm acutely conscious of the fact that it's important that people who come here feel that they're welcome and that they have free and easy access into the building. I have to manage that, on the other hand, against ensuring that members, visitors, and staff operate, and are free to do so, in a secure environment. So I'm trying to strike the balance, and I appreciate that some folks believe that we should go through the front door.

The building was completed in 1912. If you look at our visitor stats, we're up 15 per cent over last year. There are logistical challenges in admitting visitors through the front door. Certainly, there are solutions. If we, in fact, decided that admitting visitors through the front door is the way we wanted to go, I think that would involve a reconfiguration of the space.

8:30

So there are many considerations for how folks get into the building here. If we wanted to have a waiting area for those who are awaiting tours at the front door area, that would, I think, detract to a degree from the security arrangements that we would like to see. There's unanimity within the Security Coordination Committee as to the interim arrangements being optimal in the current environment.

I'm aware of the concerns. I read the papers, and I hear from folks. But I can tell you that the current arrangements are working very, very well in terms of us receiving visitors.

I leave my comments at that point.

The Chair: I'll just add that I have met with the Solicitor General and Minister of Justice, who is responsible for the sheriffs and so on that Brian referred to, and also with the Minister of Infrastructure and asked them if it would be appropriate, once this fall session or the first sitting of this new session is concluded, if they would explore with me and with people referenced by Brian the possibility of reopening the front main entrance. So there is some activity in that regard, and we'll be bringing that back once the exploration has been completed.

There are costs involved, there are logistical problems involved, there are very large groups that we don't want waiting out in the cold, and so on. There's a lot that's going into this, but suffice it to say that we're taking into consideration everything Brian just said

plus everything we're hearing from the public and from members themselves.

Mr. Lukaszuk.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm about to speak out of both sides of my mouth, but I guess I'm allowed to. I'm a politician. You know, as much as I'm concerned about any budgetary increases considering the fiscal situation that's looming on the horizon – and I think all of us at least here in this room are familiar with it – looking at House services' budget, the only area that actually is taking a significant hit is the area that, as you referred to, Mr. Speaker, refers to members' professional development. I have to tell you that the LAO probably is one of the very few employers left in Alberta, particularly in the public service industry, that offers zero or close to zero professional development for elected members. I'm noticing that whatever is left in that budget is taking a bit of a hit.

I have to tell you that that concerns me because we have elected members, both opposition and government, who make very difficult decisions on a number of issues. It would serve Albertans well if from time to time they were able to participate in professional development that is pertinent to the work that they do. As you know, Mr. Speaker, that is virtually not available right now to our members, and whatever exists in that budget is taking a significant hit. I think that is something that we should be discussing if we want competent elected members making competent decisions. They should be able to grow professionally in what they do.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Thomas. I think that everybody here who has ever been on a professional development type conference or professional development type seminar would agree with you one hundred per cent. These are extremely important opportunities for us to meet with others and to learn something about the mechanics and the procedures of legislators and in turn help us become acquainted with global issues, as it were, and see how they might apply in our own jurisdictions. I have never yet in 20-some years of being an MLA heard from a single member complaining that they didn't get something important and valuable out of attending these seminars.

However, at previous meetings of this committee I was asked to review this matter, and as a result of that review I have reduced the number of delegates that I'm forecasting to send, and I say that with regret. But that was the wish of the committee back when. So you see a reduction of – I don't know; what is it? – \$37,000 in that part of the budget. But it's up for discussion.

Before I go to Mr. Hale, I have David McNeil.

Dr. McNeil: The number of delegates that were projected for next year is the same as for this existing year. The \$37,000 difference is in the estimated cost of that travel. We've got the same number of delegates going to the various professional development conferences that we had last year. It's just that the costs of the travel to those particular conferences has been reduced because of their location this year. That's where that savings comes from. We're not reducing it over this existing year's allocations.

The Chair: In actual fact, I did reduce some in this current year, and you know about that, some of you who have called me about it.

In any event, Mr. Hale.

Mr. Hale: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two questions. The first one deals with the security that we heard Brian talk about. When we're not in session, are there going to be the same

number of sheriffs, the same security measures in place? As we know, we're not in session a whole bunch. Do these figures, the increases, take into account the maximum number of sheriffs every day, or is it based on the days that we sit?

The second . . .

The Chair: Can we just deal with that one, Jason?

Mr. Hale: Yeah. Sure.

The Chair: You know, security questions are easy to pose, and they're a bit delicate to answer, but, Mr. Hodgson, I'm sure you'll give us a clever response.

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. I'm making a general statement. Our security posture varies with the operational tempo of the Legislature Building. It follows, then, that during session we have enhanced security for the obvious reason that, you know, the members are present and we have more visitors. That gets adjusted outside of session, as you might expect.

Mr. Hale: Is that reflected in the budget increases? That's what I'm asking.

Mr. Hodgson: Yes.

The Chair: And your second part.

Mr. Hale: My second part deals with the travel that Mr. Lukaszuk was talking about. I see in here that the cost of conferences has increased, but then the cost of travel has decreased. Can you explain that increase in conferences and what that entails?

The Chair: Dr. McNeil.

Dr. McNeil: Yes. That increase of \$20,000 relates specifically to hosting. It's Alberta's turn to host the legislative broadcasting conference this year. That's what that \$20,000 is. There's a meeting of all the legislative broadcasters across the country, which is hosted on a rotational basis, and in effect it's our turn.

Mr. Hale: But under the hosting line you have a decrease. I noticed that my colleague Mrs. Forsyth talked about it last year in this committee. The reason that there was an increase last year for the hosting was because of some conferences that had to be held here. We see that decrease because those conferences are not in there, but under conferences now we see an increase. Why wouldn't the conferences you're hosting here be under hosting?

Dr. McNeil: Hosting is a different category than conferences. The hosting is reduced just because of actual costs, and the conferences went up because of the fact that we have to support this one particular conference this year.

Mr. Hale: Okay. I know one of the examples from last year. There was the CPA regional conference. There was \$150,000 budgeted for that.

Dr. McNeil: That was two years ago.

Mr. Hale: That was two years ago? So the hosting and conferences are combined when somebody comes? It's not one line item for the conferences?

Dr. McNeil: Well, it's mainly one line item.

Mr. Hale: You split it up.

Dr. McNeil: Well, yeah, we split it up in terms of certain elements of the conference being budgeted under hosting and other elements just under conferences.

The Chair: For example, guest speakers aren't necessarily hosted as such, but they are a conference expense if we're paying for them, so it's our turn to host that one.

Who is hosting? Is that Jillian Tilley hosting that one? Who is doing the broadcast one?

Mrs. Scarlett: It's Rhonda.

8:40

The Chair: Oh, Rhonda. That's right. I didn't see you. Rhonda has joined us. Rhonda Sorensen is the head of our communications.

You'll be looking after that conference this year. When is it?

Ms Sorensen: Likely late August.

The Chair: Late August. Can we all come? Okay. Thank you. I have Mr. Lukaszuk, followed by Mrs. Fritz.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you. Just for the record, Mr. Speaker, to make myself perfectly clear, when I was referring to professional development, what I had in mind was ongoing professional education in best practices or prevailing trends in governance; public accounting; national and international trends in health care, child care; issues that are actually pertinent to the work that members do every day. I know that we'd benefit greatly from being up to date on those issues. It's a common practice in most places of employment and, frankly, in parliamentary set-ups. But that is something that our members simply don't get to benefit from unless they choose to do it on their own account and fully pay out of their pocket, and I know many do because they simply care to be good at what they do. But that is something that we should in the future look into.

The Chair: Very good. The educational stuff that we could do right here, in other words, would be one such category, right?

Mr. Lukaszuk: You bet.

The Chair: Okay. Let's diarize that one, Bev, for some future discussion.

Mrs. Fritz.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. My question relates to the committee operations that are going to be broadcast in the new federal building. I wondered if that was a part of the original plan to do that or if that's a new addition and what the cost of that would be.

The Chair: Which item are you under? Tab 5?

Mrs. Fritz: When you gave the presentation, you said, Mr. Speaker, that the committee operations will be broadcast, and you said that that was a part of this increase overall in IT.

The Chair: Is it under House services, David?

Dr. McNeil: Yes.

Mrs. Fritz: I looked through here, and I couldn't see where it's listed. That's why I'm asking a question. I thought it might be under telecommunications, but I wasn't sure.

Dr. McNeil: Well, yeah, a part of that is that it would really be under office equipment rental/purchase . . .

Mrs. Fritz: Okay. So that's where it's listed. Thank you.

Dr. McNeil: . . . and also in earnings in that we need to hire somebody with certain broadcasting experience. Presently we're paying CTV almost \$300,000 a year to broadcast just this session. What we want to do is transition to a position where we have the capability to do this in-house. So this next year is going to be a transition year, where we install the equipment, and that'll take quite a number of months. But we need to have the technical expertise to sort of oversee that, manage that, so that we're in a position, probably the year after, to start doing some if not all of this broadcasting of both session and committees in-house and change, instead of paying \$300,000 externally, to have that capability and flexibility to handle that internally.

Mrs. Fritz: Right. That makes more sense to me, then. Thank you for that explanation.

The Chair: That's a good question.

Okay. Any other questions here on tab 5?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, that piqued my interest. When you were talking about in-house broadcasting, are you talking via computer Internet service and no longer on television, or are you looking at having access to broadcasting still via a standard television network?

Dr. McNeil: Well, both. I mean, we Internet-broadcast the session now as well as do it on television. It may be that we reach the point, depending on the volume, that we have our own broadcast outlet, in other words a station, as the Ontario Parliament does, as the Quebec Parliament does, as the federal Parliament does. These are just really the first steps towards that, having that capability. But our intention is not necessarily to stop broadcasting over, well, the airwaves, over cable, but just to, I guess, enlarge the number of things that we can actually broadcast.

For example, this committee would have the capability in the new facility to broadcast this particular committee and all the other committees of the Assembly. This was part of sort of the long-range plan for the federal building when we started this project – I hate to say how many years ago that was – but when this was initiated a number of years ago. Does that answer your question?

The Chair: I think the simplest thing, as David says, is that we're looking at doing more of it ourselves, Thomas, because we now have the capabilities, the facilities, and so on. So there might be a short-term investment for a longer term saving.

All right. Let us move on to tab 6, then, please. Tab 6 is visitor services. On the left-hand side are some budget highlights, and perhaps I could ask Brian or Al to go through this, please.

Mr. Hodgson: Well, visitor services is asking for a 9.76 per cent increase from the previous budget for 2015-16. The expenses in that figure comprise normal increases in terms of merit and market adjustment as well as filling some wage positions such as heritage interpreters, the guides if you will, retail gift shop assistants, and program assistants. These additions would fit us well, then, for our enhancement in programming in the Federal Public Building. I'm sure most of you know that the footprint on the main floor of the Federal Public Building will largely comprise visitor services operations – and I think they amount to about 14,000 square feet – so a gift shop that is 2.2 times the size of the current gift shop, a temporary exhibit gallery of about 2,600 square feet, an 80-seat

theatre-in-the-round, and a permanent exhibitry of around 5,600 square feet.

So we're going to see a significant enhancement in our ability to reach Albertans and tell them the story of the development of our parliamentary government and why they should perhaps be a bit more engaged in that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any questions under tab 6?

If not, let us move, then, to tab 7, please. Tab 7 is information technology services. This comes under the bailiwick of Mrs. Scarlett. Cheryl, would you please take us through the branch budget highlight for ITS?

Mrs. Scarlett: Yes. Thank you very much. For ITS the projected increase being requested is a 3.37 per cent increase. The majority of that is attributed to the manpower component, again, just the normal cost-of-living and merit adjustments plus the incremental benefits.

On the operational side there is a slight adjustment in terms of \$8,000 in some of our areas, which are strictly cost-of-living adjustments based on actual costs for the components. You will see that there is a one-time, only this year addition of \$30,000 being requested under the conference line. The other conference that the Legislative Assembly is slated to host this year, as David mentioned, on part of our rotational basis is our CAPA conference. That is an association comprised of finance, HR, and IT professionals from all of the jurisdictions across Canada. We started this 14 years ago, and it is now our turn again to host this conference. It is also being hosted at the end of August at a similar time with broadcast, trying to also, with that, save some money, if you will, in terms of having them both together.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any questions about IT?

Seeing none, let us move on, then, to item 8, the legislative committees. Shannon Dean is here. Would you please take us through your highlights for the branch budget expenditures, et cetera, for the legislative committees?

Ms Dean: Certainly, Mr. Chair. There is a modest increase of \$16,000 being requested from last year's budget. Most of that pertains to operational expense increases associated with inflationary factors for committee meals and advertising. There is a \$1,000 increase with respect to HR expenses, and that is tied with the anticipated increase in the number of committee meetings.

8:50

The Chair: Thank you.

Any questions on legislative committees? Jason Hale.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that with Public Accounts there's a decrease in the estimate. That's one of the best committees we have. They meet very often when we're in session. They do some great work. I'm wondering why that's being decreased, you know, when some of the other committees that don't meet as often are staying the same.

Ms Dean: There are two reasons for the decrease in Public Accounts. We've pulled the hosting budget out of the individual committees, and it's been moved into committees general. That's about \$7,000. Also, the CCPAC conference that committee members go to is in Winnipeg in 2015, so the costs associated

with that travel are much less than Newfoundland, which was last year.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Any other questions under item 8?

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, I do have another question. The Personal Information Protection Act review, \$76,000. Can you explain why the cost is so high?

The Chair: Shannon?

Ms Dean: Sure. That's our estimate for statutory review committee work. It doesn't necessitate the establishment of a new committee – that review could be taken over by an existing committee – but that's our estimate with respect to advertising, if the committee wants public submissions, holding public meetings, preparation of a report, et cetera.

Mr. Hale: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions on item 8? Was there a replacement page that went out to everybody? There was one typo somewhere, and everybody got that, right? Okay. Thank you very much.

Let's move on, then, to item 9. Item 9 is MLA administration. We have an explanatory sheet to deal with here, and I guess the bottom line is that there is a small total administration increase. Well, I shouldn't say small; it's \$72,000. Scott, is this your bailiwick?

Mr. Ellis: Sure, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Could you take us through some of the highlights, please?

Mr. Ellis: If you turn to your summary of budget estimates, which is labelled at the bottom of that page as summary, you can see that there are three main categories of the MLA administration budget: human resource expenses, operational expenses, and then the member services allowances, which is basically your constituency budget.

In the human resource expenses area there was a reallocation of a meals allowance. Basically, that was formerly included in member services allowances, and it was moved down into travel, where it better reflects the nature of the expenses being incurred in that particular area.

The only impact that is of any consequence in the human resource expenses area is a small increase, \$71,000, that is related to constituency office staff benefits funding. For those of you who may not be aware, the constituency office staff benefit costs are covered by the LAO with respect to such things as health and wellness benefits, insurance, long-term disability, and those types of benefits. There has been a small increase relative to the general illness provision with respect to benefit costs in that particular area of \$71,000.

If we go through the operational expenses, there is an increase in travel. That's the transfer, that I referred to earlier, of the meal per diem down to a section below. No overall impact in that move. There's some slight increases in the operational expenses related to advertising. This is an actual expense increase in terms of our directory advertising that we do on behalf of members in various phone books across the province. In addition, there has been a small increase in our insurance rates as charged to us for risk management insurance for the upcoming year.

The Chair: Thank you. Do you have another point there, Scott?

Mr. Ellis: We can talk about the members' services allowances.

The Chair: Before we go to that, are there any questions on anything said so far? No? Thank you.

Let's go on, then, Scott, to the MSA.

Mr. Ellis: We've included in your package a summary of the changes. It's page 3 in this section, and it's entitled Members' Services Allowance (Budget 2015-2016) – Proposed Changes. This is really a summarization of what is expressed in the words on page 2 of this particular area. I'll just go through the changes that we are anticipating in these areas and are requesting here today.

For the constituency office element, which consists of office operations and staffing and supplies, let's deal with the office operations. We have a split between rural and urban. We're applying a 2 per cent general inflation figure to both the rural and urban constituency offices element. In terms of staffing, we're combining a market and merit increase adjustment to the existing staffing component, which is \$82,315, to come up with a new staffing component of \$88,324.

We are also applying a 2 per cent general inflation increase to supplies. Previously that supply amount, provided to each and every constituency budget, was \$2,940. That increase amounts to \$2,999.

If we go down to the next element, which is the communication element, the Speaker mentioned earlier that the postage rate has increased. There is a formula that determines the amount of resources available to members in their constituencies for communication. When we take and apply the new cost of postage to the electors, we come up with an increase in that communication allowance. This is done on an overall basis for all 87. The actual calculations per constituency would vary amongst the constituencies, depending on the number of electors within the various constituency offices.

We have also applied to the promotional element a 2 per cent general inflation increase on the base amount. That amount previously was \$2,982, and it now goes up to \$3,042. In the context of that formula we've also applied the population numbers that are estimated for '15-16. The population number estimated in this particular case is 4,300,900. When we apply those new numbers to the promotion element, we come up with an increase of \$19,000, or 3.96 per cent.

If we move down to the last element, the matrix element, we have applied a 2 per cent general inflation figure to all the categories of matrix scores. So where previously a score of minus 18 to zero would have garnered \$6,120 in funding, it now garners \$6,242. The overall impact is approximately a 2 per cent increase to the total amount that's distributed under the matrix element.

The grand total increase of all the elements in the application of parameters as I've alluded to is 8.94 per cent.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any questions under tab 9?

9:00

Ms Smith: Just keeping in mind the calamity that happened in southern Alberta in 2013 and how it did require extra dollars for certain constituency offices to deal with the extra burden of dealing with constituency concerns, is there a contingency allowance that would deal with those kinds of catastrophic events? We seem to have one every year, so I'm just wondering where that budget line item would be accounted for.

Mr. Ellis: We have not budgeted for any contingency at this point.

The Chair: But we did help out a few constituencies last year. I can't remember the source of those funds, but we didn't go looking for additional dollars from an envelope that didn't exist. We were able to find the money within, so to speak.

I remember, Danielle, exactly what you're talking about because I approved a few of those immediately. You were one as I recall.

David.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. We don't budget a contingency amount, but as we did last year, you know, we find those monies within the budget, and we would do the same, I think, if another situation arose. We would find those funds, and the source of those funds would likely be – some members expend almost all of their constituency budgets; other members do not. There's a tendency for cabinet ministers not to spend as high a percentage of their constituency budget as private members do. I mean, that's where we would likely source those funds if they were necessary.

The Chair: Jason Hale.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. That brings up an interesting question. Can you tell us how many constituencies spend their full budget, how many are under, if any go over, to see if the 2 per cent increase or the 8.9 per cent total increase is needed? If there are a number of constituencies that are turning money back over to general revenue or to the Speaker, maybe we don't need the increase. Maybe the ones that are spending their limit need to have some cost control measures if there are ones that can do the same job without spending it. Just a ratio of how many spend their total budget and how many turn money back in.

The Chair: That's a good question. We don't have that information just at the tip of our hat here, but I can tell you that generally speaking, there are several who don't consume their entire budget. But we don't know that till after the fact, unfortunately, so we have no way of telling. Our job here is to try and be as fair as we can to everybody and say: "Here's your allocated amount. Please work within it, and whatever you don't need, you don't use, turn back." The practice has worked very well.

I don't know if, David or Scott, you will have a comment beyond that to make.

Dr. McNeil: Just as a general principle, there's a formula that's applied, which was developed over time by this committee, which says that this is the basis on which members are funded in their constituency operations. We don't say, "Oh, you should spend it all," or "You should only spend 80 per cent of it." Again, it goes back to the individual MLA. It's up to him or her as to how they want to spend those funds. Some decide that the way they operate – you know, they may not buy a lot of pins or whatever. Others may spend more on communications. Even within these categories they're allocated for a certain purpose, but overall you don't have to spend only up to a certain limit for communications or only up to a certain limit for promotions. It's the individual member that's managing his or her budget, period.

Our only concern is if they go over the budget. You know, we provide them monthly feedback in terms of what their expenditures are, and towards the end of the year we give more frequent feedback than that, especially to those members whom we see might be possibly going over the edge.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: Jason, as you know, in constituencies like yours and mine – I have 17,500 square kilometres and 21 communities to compete with for office space, and I can rent for \$1,500, all included, with utilities. Linda Johnson and Matt Jeneroux and others in large urban centres don't have 21 communities and a lot of opportunities to pick and choose where you can get affordable rent. So we're not all faced with the same circumstance.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, George just took the words out of my mouth. Yesterday I had a discussion with one MLA who was very happy to tell me that rent for a constituency office in that constituency is \$600 a month. I'm just conversing with my colleague next to me, and she pays \$3,900 per month. So the variance is just incredible.

The Chair: Yeah. There are so many factors included in all of this. We could really discuss this for the whole day, and believe me, this committee has done some of that discussion. Some of us here will remember that.

Nonetheless, a supplemental, Jason?

Mr. Hale: No. I just wouldn't mind seeing some numbers showing how many.

The Chair: Okay.

Let us move on, then. If there's nothing else under tab 9, we can go to tab 10, please. Is that where we're at? Yes. Government members' services, tab 10. I think this is fairly straightforward.

Scott, do you want to make a quick comment on the numbers here?

Mr. Ellis: Okay. For the government members' caucus the number of private members is 42, and as David alluded to earlier, that is a significant increase over what the budget was in 2014-15 because of those additional private members. The per-member amount has been adjusted for the manpower and operational inflationary impacts and market and merit to reflect those, and you come up basically with \$3,333,011. The committee research support dollars have also been increased slightly for general inflation blended with the market and merit, so you see increases in that area as well, coming up with a total budget for the government members' caucus of \$4,240,000.

The Chair: Basically, we went in the estimates from 29 private members on the government side last year – in other words, the year we're living through right now – which has obviously changed just within the last few months, up to 42, so we're projecting 42 private members to be in place come April 1 of next year, which is the budget we're talking about. Any questions on government members' services?

If not, we can move to the next tab. Thank you. Item 11 is the Official Opposition, so the reverse scenario applies here. In the 2014-15 estimates I believe we had 17 Official Opposition, and we currently have 14. That's the projection we're working with.

Any other comments, Scott, before we chat?

Mr. Ellis: Just that the per-member amount, \$79,357, is the same and consistent throughout all caucuses. The same amount of increase has been applied, that 5.8 per cent, to the leader's office allowance, the Calgary caucus office, and the committee support. That's consistent for all caucuses.

The Chair: Understood.

It's pretty straightforward. Any questions there?

No. Let's move to the next tab, then. Thank you. Item 12 is the Alberta Liberal caucus, estimated at five members and projected forward at five members.

Just before I go to Dr. Sherman, Scott, is there anything you want to add here quickly?

Mr. Ellis: Nothing to add here.

The Chair: No? Okay.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, hypothetically speaking, if there was a federal election being called, we may be down to three members, so a question: will there be an impact on the leader's allowance and on committee support, and if so, how much?

The Chair: Well, you know, I heard this question – and I don't want to get into the House business at the moment – but strictly technically speaking, as I think everybody here probably knows by now, you don't have to resign as an MLA until the writ is dropped and your nomination has been approved by the Chief Electoral Officer. Now, the projection – the projection – is to have a federal election somewhere in October of next year, so there will be some sort of an impact.

Scott, do you want to get into some of the nitty-gritty? I realize it's hypothetical, but can we help Dr. Sherman?

9:10

Mr. Ellis: Well, I guess it depends on the members that were actually dropped from the caucus, what the impact would be, but in terms of the per-member amount, obviously, if there were two members, you would lose two times the \$79,357. At that point there would still be a leader, presumably, and there would still be the need for committee support, and those would continue until such time as this committee decides to change those allocations.

Dr. Sherman: Will those sums remain constant? The reason is that it's basically for manpower and staffing. We have a lot of staff, and they need some certainty. Right now, unfortunately, they're feeling a lot of uncertainty. I know that when the New Democrats had two members, they were given a leader's allowance with the two members, so a question: will that leader's allowance stay the same and will the committee support stay the same if we have three members?

The Chair: I think, Scott, that what might be helpful is if you could just give us a flash point here on how the leader's allowance is calculated. There are several new members here.

Mr. VanderBurg: Raj, just throw in the towel.

The Chair: Notwithstanding Mr. VanderBurg's helpful assistance here to my left, Scott, that might address where Dr. Sherman is coming from.

Mr. Ellis: The leader's office allowance was determined a number of years ago, and the originating comparator was what it costs to operate a ministerial office. Additional resources were recognized in the caucus budget to support a leader in the leader's role. So as long as there's a leader in the caucus, then those funds will remain there.

Dr. Sherman: Even if we only had three members.

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

Dr. Sherman: Okay. So is it my understanding that if or when we lose two members, the only hit to our budget will be \$160,000, \$79,357 times two?

The Chair: Yeah. Basically, your private member's allowance amount would change, but the leader's official office allowance would not change, based on the way I understand it.

David McNeil.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. Just to add to that, that would be pro-rated depending on when you're reduced from five to three. So if it happened on April 1, you'd lose \$160,000; if it happened six months later, you'd lose half of that.

Dr. Sherman: Perfect. Thank you. That answers my question.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Let us move on, then. Is there any other question for item 12? None.

Let us go to item 13, then. Item 13 is basically the same discussion with regard to the NDP, and I would note that I don't see an NDP member yet. Is there somebody on teleconference from the NDP? I don't think so. We haven't been advised. Were we advised of any absences? I did not receive any notification. Allison Quast is indicating that, no, we were not advised. Nonetheless, we have people who know the numbers here.

Mr. Ellis, is there anything you want to add? I think it's pretty straightforward, but the floor is yours.

Mr. Ellis: No. It's the same thing that you get in this particular budget category.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any questions with regard to the NDP opposition services estimates?

Seeing none, let us move on to item 14. The issue here pertains to independent members. Of course, there's nothing showing here under Mr. Allen because he is no longer an independent member.

However, the next page shows us Mr. Anglin, who is estimated to be a private member in 2015-16, and the costs are the same, \$79,000, as they are for other private members in other caucuses. Any questions regarding that one?

Seeing none, we'll turn the page. Donna Kennedy-Glans was for a short time an independent member. We have no estimate going forward under that name.

Mr. Webber, on the next page, of course, has resigned, so we have no estimate for him.

That concludes independent members. Any questions with regard to independent members' budgets?

Seeing none, let us move on, then, to item 15, special funding requirements. There are a number of different people who might be called upon here to comment on this. Who wants to lead off here?

Brian, we may need you at the table for this just in case it gets there. There's a spot here by Mr. Reynolds. If you'd wish to occupy it, that would be helpful.

Scott, do you want to lead us off with a general overview, or Cheryl? Who would like to take this one?

Mr. Ellis: I can take the overview.

The Chair: Scott. Okay. You take the overview, please.

Mr. Ellis: There's basically some information, some background information, provided here for the benefit of members who are new to the committee. Following decisions that were made in 2008, the LAO has been actively planning with Alberta

Infrastructure to relocate their office to the renovated federal building. Alberta Infrastructure is incurring all the building costs, including the parkade and plaza.

Throughout the planning process unique operational requirements of the LAO were identified and built into the plan. These unique requirements were committee rooms – I think we've talked about the additional committee rooms – the visitor centre, the increased functionality and programming elements there with the permanent exhibit gallery, the temporary exhibit gallery, a theatre, an expanded gift shop; and then all of the LAO offices, including caucus offices. Then there's the new education centre, which is on the tail end of this federal building project, whereby the current pedway operations for visitor services will be renovated, specifically the mock Legislature classrooms in that area. Alberta Infrastructure has provided space in the building to accommodate all of the above and the resulting base building construction.

In addition, Alberta Infrastructure has accommodated most of the tenant improvements, which include committee rooms, the visitor centre, and some of the LAO and MLA offices as well as the education centre. These tenant improvements will be built into the specifications established by the LAO in consultation with consultants contracted by the LAO for this purpose. During the planning process it was agreed that the LAO would be responsible to procure and put in place any computer equipment, broadcasting, et cetera required to support the LAO office operations in all areas. In addition, it was also agreed that tenant improvements required in the gift shop would be the responsibility of the Legislative Assembly Office. Previous LAO budgets have requested funds to fulfill these obligations as the funds were needed. The obligations can be summarized as follows: consulting services in each of those areas, equipment and tenant improvements in each of those areas, and that's basically it.

The current funding request is made up of a number of elements, five to be exact. The total amount being requested is \$2,840,000. This request is for planned expenditures in 2015-16 to accommodate and support the Legislative Assembly Office staff and operation, members, and caucus staff who will be relocated to the Edmonton federal building, likely in the summer of 2015.

The following is a breakdown of that request by type of expenditure. The first area is the committee rooms. This request here relates to broadcasting and audiovisual equipment, some consulting services associated with broadcasting and AV, and then the actual installation of equipment.

The visitor centre component is made up of consulting services for the exhibit gallery and theatre.

The gift shop has been included here just for information purposes only as the gift shop is expected to be complete by the end of this fiscal year.

In the area of caucus and LAO offices we have budgeted for some sound masking to be included in the tenant fit-outs as well as workstation accessories. Both of these items were not provided by Alberta Infrastructure. They basically reduced their budget for these kinds of items so that they could stay within the budget for the overall building cost. In addition, we have some consulting services for the data centre and migration to the Edmonton federal building and computer equipment. Those two items in total amount to \$400,000.

The fifth item is the education centre, and there are some consulting services needed to guide us in the development of the AV equipment for the mock Legislature classrooms.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just a couple of other observations. According to Alberta Infrastructure the builders have officially turned the building over

to Alberta Infrastructure as at November 26, I believe. Secondly, based on the information we've received, it appears that the renovations are completed to 70 per cent now, so we're just about there and anticipating a fruitful opening somewhere during this particular budget's year of 2015-16.

I'm sure there are going to be a few questions here or comments. Let's go around the room. I have Jason Hale, followed by Mrs. Fritz and Dr. Sherman.

9:20

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the \$2.8 million for the special request there were also increases noted in House services and visitor services. What is the total, then, of the \$2.8 million? Plus, how much for this special budget? Then also last year there was \$3.3 million, just about \$3.4 million, allocated. Was that money all spent on the renovations? What exactly was that money budgeted for? Is this money on top of that \$3.4 million already spent?

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. If you flip back to right before the first tab, you'll see that there's an overall reduction there of about a million dollars.

Scott, do you want to answer the specific questions?

I think if you look at the information under the tab in question now, which is tab 15, you can see how that math works and how we get to \$2.8 million, but I think some elaboration is requested here.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. Just to clarify. The special request is \$2.8 million. Does that \$2.8 million include the money from House services and visitor services that was mentioned before, or is this \$2.8 million in addition to those funds requested?

Dr. McNeil: That \$2.8 million is in addition. The funds that you saw in House services were related to staffing costs, in other words to support the activities in these areas where we're expending these funds. Basically, this is mostly capital expenditure or consulting service expenditure, but those other ones would be ongoing operational costs related to occupying that building and then operating in that building.

Mr. Hale: Okay. Then my subsequent question. The \$3.4 million from last year: has that money all been spent?

Dr. McNeil: The answer to that is that it wasn't all spent last year because of the fact that there was an additional year's delay, so there was a portion of that money that was not spent last year. Is that correct, Scott?

Mr. Ellis: I think it depends what year we're referring to here. If it's the '14-15 estimate, those dollars will be spent in this current year.

Dr. McNeil: Yes. But in the previous year, '13-14, there was a portion that was not spent in the previous year's estimate because of the fact that there was a year's delay in getting into the building, and that especially impacted the visitor centre, where we're spending the money this year for that purpose.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. McNeil: I think Cheryl has got something.

The Chair: Cheryl, did you want to add something to that point?

Mrs. Scarlett: If you wish, I have a summary as it relates to committee rooms and some of the IT to help put into perspective

the support so far and where those dollars have been expended and then what is being projected in terms of next year, in terms of what's being asked for.

The Chair: Do you have it handy?

Mrs. Scarlett: I do.

The Chair: You do?

Mrs. Scarlett: If you want to go through it right now as an example.

The Chair: Let me just ask Mr. Hale.

Mr. Hale: If I could just get a copy of it.

The Chair: Okay. Does that suffice?

Mr. Hale: Yeah. The basis of my question is: last year you approved the \$3.4 million. This year you want to approve \$2.8 million. Next year what is it going to be? Is this going to continue to cost us millions of dollars, or are these one-time fees? The \$3.4 million that we allocated last year: that's a one-time cost. This is going to be on top of it, \$2.8 million. When's it going to stop?

The Chair: Are there going to be some ongoing costs that will show up in our budget, let's say a year from now after the centre is opened, projected for '16-17, or does this bring it to an end, and then the reflective costs of staffing and operating get reflected elsewhere? Will there still be this tab, basically?

Mr. Hale: Exactly.

Mr. Ellis: As we get closer and closer to the actual move-in and establishing the equipment that we've got, that we purchased, get it installed and operating, costs will obviously go down. There won't be any need to purchase additional equipment.

I'll let Cheryl talk to the IT and broadcasting side of things because I think that there are some capital equipment costs that will continue likely on into '16-17, but for the most part the consulting services won't be required anymore. The work will have been completed in terms of the tenant fit-outs in a lot of the areas in the federal building, and there won't be any ongoing costs relative to consulting services or equipment.

The Chair: Yeah. I think that nails it down. To operate the place, those costs will show up elsewhere in our existing budgets. We won't need a separate line item. At least that's what the hope is, right?

Mr. Ellis: Right.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Let's go to Yvonne Fritz, followed by Raj Sherman and Danielle Smith.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is along the same lines of this cost coming forward this year. Some of these are very broad services, important services, that you would think would happen as the infrastructure was planned and designed and whatnot, that that would be taking place, like sound masking for \$600,000. I see that that's just an estimate here about the \$600,000.

I would be interested in, actually, if you don't mind, the committee rooms, about the broadcasting and the audiovisual equipment, the consulting, et cetera, even just a few more details.

It doesn't have to be extensive but just a few more details about that area if you do have that with you.

The Chair: Cheryl, why don't you go ahead, then, and give that detail now, and then it'll be on the record. I'm sure other MLAs would also be interested.

Thomas, on this point?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Yes.

The Chair: Yeah. Very briefly while Cheryl gets her notes together.

Mr. Lukaszuk: While Cheryl is doing that, my principal question is this. This cost of broadcasting and IT is creeping up in several line items. Sorry; I am new to this committee. This is my first meeting in a while. Is this whole endeavour of broadcasting and doing now all committee meetings not only through audio but audiovisual through television networks and then assuming this capability one day of doing it all ourselves, basically setting up our own CCPAC, is this something that was this committee's will and the committee has directed LAO to do that, or is this somebody's project?

The Chair: Good question.

Mr. Lukaszuk: You know, I have yet to receive my first phone call from my constituents saying: I wish you had your own television network because I really enjoy watching you on TV so much.

The Chair: Cheryl, do you want to cover that in your comments?

Mrs. Scarlett: I can.

The Chair: Sorry; I have Dr. Sherman and Ms Smith after this, so go ahead.

Mrs. Scarlett: Okay. With respect to the questions about our mandate in broadcast, several years back in this committee there was a presentation made, and the committee did give approval for the concept of LAO working towards in-house broadcast services. So we own all of our own equipment in terms of the current structure. As we move forward into the federal building, a lot of what you're seeing in terms of expenditures we have been acquiring in this current year's budget related to the broadcast in addition to AV and starting to build out, then, our TV control rooms, our master control rooms, the facilities in the media centre for all members in terms of however you wish to use that.

We have also been on a consolidated basis working towards expanding and accommodating the public and members relative to not just the broadcast over TV channels or over the TV channel right now but looking in terms of what we want to do with that in the future. We, of course, have our internal channel, and through that internal channel we will be in the new building as we evolve here able to – you'd go to three or four channels, so you can pick up whatever you want. You can right now stream over the Internet and receive the gavel in terms of the Chamber. The thought is the same for committee rooms, and tied in with that in terms of some of our IT initiatives is the ability now to take and receive it to mobile devices, so we're trying to make it more available to the public in many different modes.

But to answer your question: yes, there was a mandate in terms of us expanding the broadcast and working towards doing it in-house.

The Chair: Okay. So in other words it's a pre-existing decision made prior to the 28th Legislature, prior to 2012, then.

A short supplemental, Thomas.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. Well, you know, as great as it would be to have an all-Lukaszuk, all-day television network – we will all agree – I think, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time, considering what we're facing financially, perhaps it would be time to reconsider that particular project. Maybe there will be a better time to do it in the future, but as we're looking at balancing priorities of what we potentially may be cutting out of your office, our offices, LAO, I just don't see that anywhere near the top of the priorities at this point in time.

9:30

The Chair: I suspect that the infrastructure costs have already been farmed out, contracted, and the facilities are being built, but the actual functionality of that and operation of it and hiring staff to do it might be another matter. I don't know the answer straight away.

Cheryl, let's finish off the second part, which addresses Mrs. Fritz's question and Mr. Hale's question as well, some of the details about the committee rooms and whatever. If you could elaborate on that, please.

Mrs. Scarlett: Okay. I'll have to talk quickly here. In terms of the committee rooms we're talking about in the federal building, there are four committee rooms, there are three multipurpose meeting rooms, there's the pavilion space, and there's the broadcast area in addition to the media centre.

To date, with existing dollars that have been approved, the following examples of equipment have been acquired and prestaged. We've not just been acquiring the equipment, but off site we have a facility where we're actually putting it together, building it, testing, configuring. So there's a lot of work that has happened so far. In terms of all four committee rooms relative to equipment and prestaging we've got the full AV functionality, the audio, the presentation systems, the screens, audio-video conferencing, control booths, and the wireless network conductivity.

In terms of two of the committee rooms of the four, we've got the equipment so that we could accommodate simultaneous interpretation when required. The breakout rooms also have the equipment in them. In terms of two of our rooms, we have acquired for broadcast purposes the equipment, cameras, and the equipment for behind the scenes, the TV control room, and some of the equipment for the master to tie it together.

So to address your concern there, we are at a stage where not with all four but with two of the four relative to broadcast we can start to move forward. In addition to that: racks, cable, a lot of what we call the central equipment, control room, that controls all the sound relative to that, and, obviously, installation and design services.

As we go forward, then, in terms of what was being proposed for next year's budget as it relates to AV committee rooms, it would be the completion of the third committee room for broadcast functionality, completion of the associated TV control rooms that go with that, the video edit suite. A lot of the installs now – as we said, we have not been allowed in that building, so now we have to take what we have, and we have to actually spend six months putting it in there, installing it, getting it ready for when you move postsession.

We also have the Aiphone system. In terms of the telephone system that we have in the House, it needs to connect over into the federal building, the connectivity through the pedway just in terms

of connecting everything. Right now I've been talking in terms of committee rooms, but as it relates to IT, the extension of the wireless network system, the whole build of the infrastructure, our data centre, is moving from here over there, and we have to make sure that everything in terms of our precincts are connected and that we've got the redundant run coming back, digital signage, and a lot of labour associated with the installs.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will be having a comfort break in a few minutes. I have two speakers left, and then we'll take a short comfort break if we could.

Let's go to Dr. Sherman, followed by Danielle Smith.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question: what are the cumulative sums of money that the LAO has spent on the relocation to the federal building from years past, including this year? How much of that stuff downloaded from Infrastructure onto the LAO? And, lastly, what's the date we're moving in?

The Chair: Well, I'm not going to answer the second question because I've tried to answer it three times before, and I've been incorrect with those estimates based on information from others. Who is wanting to address this? Scott? The issue is: how much of this is Alberta Infrastructure cost and how much of it is LAO cost, and has some stuff from Infrastructure been put on our plate, so to speak?

Mr. Ellis: I don't have an accumulated total. I can cite a couple of examples. For example, in the gift shop situation that was something that we were going to be responsible for that AI was not going to be responsible for. The fit-out of that particular space is in the neighbourhood of \$900,000. That is one item that we've taken on rather than Infrastructure. There are reasons for that, I think, in the sense that we wanted to design the operation of that particular area to what we wanted to have in terms of functionality in the gift shop and how we wanted to present the product that we have to show there.

The one other example I can think of is in the current budget, which is sound masking the workstation accessories. The sound masking was deleted for the whole building in order to have Alberta Infrastructure save some costs towards the end of the project. Other tenants in the building are looking at reinstating the sound masking because they have concerns about confidentiality in the office space in the building. So that's one item that comes to mind.

The workstation accessories are the same thing. They provide the bulk of the cost in terms of the actual workstations themselves, filing cabinets, large filing systems. They just didn't go to the extent of putting in keyboard trays and having monitor arms and other phone accessories, those kinds of things. So we're taking on those particular items.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. McNeil feels brave enough to answer the second question of the estimated date of move-in. Dr. McNeil, we are all impatiently waiting for your response.

Dr. McNeil: It's a phased move-in, likely to start with the visitor services gift shop in the middle of May; then over May and June in sequence, various sections of the LAO. We thought that over the summer, mainly July and maybe in the middle of August, is when we would move the caucuses, you know, trying to avoid any involvement in any movement preparation for moving the caucuses until after session, which we assume at the latest is

maybe the end of – and we don't know what next year's calendar would look like, but let's say the first or second week of June. So that would be the general expectation in a broad sense. But, as Cheryl mentioned, then we've got sort of four to five months of work to do to get the place ready to move in, especially in terms of the IT support, the central IT structures that we need, that are here, that provide support to all members of the Assembly, both here in Edmonton and across the province. We have to, in effect, duplicate that over there and keep this operating, and when we've got it operating over there, then we can start to move people in.

Although the Speaker mentioned that the building was turned over to Alberta Infrastructure, we have four to five months' work, which we can't really start until the middle of January. So that's what's really determining the schedule. But that's our best guess right now as to the timing and sequence of those moves.

The Chair: Okay. Let me jump in here. Dr. Sherman, a quick supplemental.

Dr. Sherman: What was the total cumulative cost to the LAO over the recent years and this year?

Dr. McNeil: We can get you that just by sort of adding up the numbers in the last number of budgets, but it's fairly significant. I think in '13-14 it was almost \$4 million. Last year, as you can see, it was \$3.35 million. This next year we're talking \$2.8 million. There have been quite a number of costs that we've had to bear apart from what Alberta Infrastructure bore.

As Scott mentioned, certain of those costs have been sort of transferred over to us. One example is the sound masking. That was originally something that we didn't budget for. We assumed that that would be part of the – and, you know, we expressed that concern when we were advised that. I said that it's important in our environment that we have a secure sound-masking system given the nature of the business that the caucuses, the members are in. That's just one example of the kind of costs that we've had to bear.

9:40

The Chair: I have two speakers left, and then perhaps we can vote on this and then have our comfort break.

Let's go to Danielle Smith, followed by Tom Lukaszuk.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I'm not a fan of this project. I think it began at a \$275 million reno. I think it's \$375 million now and counting. I've visited the office space that's been assigned to the Official Opposition, and it's opulent. It's going to be really difficult for MLAs to move into that opulent structure next year when we're at \$43 for oil.

I wonder if the time has come to rethink whether MLAs should be in this building at all. I think that it came to my attention multiple times from Mr. McIver that we wanted to put one wall up to separate a big office and make it into two small ones, and we were denied because it was going to cost \$110,000. So I have to question the wisdom of putting MLAs into a building that is so expensive to renovate since we've seen, of course, recently as well how quickly caucuses can change. We know that every election we're going to have a different configuration in the Legislature. Every year it seems that we've got new independents or individuals changing caucuses.

I wonder if maybe now is the time to look back to what we used to do when Mr. Kowalski used to manage the Legislature. I gather it was handed over to the government to manage the Legislature when he was public works minister. I wonder if actually it makes more sense – since LAO only has, as I understand it, three of the

11 floors in the federal building – if the government should move to the federal building and the MLAs should move back to the Legislature. In other Legislatures, particularly Saskatchewan, all of the MLAs are in the Legislature. I have to say that it'd be far more convenient for those of us who have to be in the Legislature to be there rather than having to worry about increasing the bells.

Perhaps with the Annex, being an older building, that was not going to be appropriate for executive offices, but I have grave reservations about us moving forward on a path where we give LAO control over three of the floors, and government, I gather, is in control over the rest. It seems to me like we may need to rethink this entire project.

I don't know whether or not all 87 MLAs can be accommodated in the Legislature, but knowing what the floor plan is for our offices and now that we're down to 14, I just have to say that I don't even know how David and others are going to reconfigure that space cost-effectively to be able to accommodate our smaller caucus. I just wonder at what point we take a step back and even ask whether this move makes sense for MLAs for the reasons that I've suggested.

The Chair: Dr. McNeil wishes to comment.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. Just in terms of the facts of the situation, the LAO will be occupying most of the basement, most of the main floor, and floors 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The LAO will be the main tenant in the federal building, not the government. We occupy, you know, 60 to 70 per cent of the space in the building.

In terms of the configuration, the construction, the walls and so on are something called a DIRTT wall system. They're movable walls. That's part of the design. We spent a lot of time working with the architects and so on in terms of how we might have to adapt after each election or by-election to the size of the spaces. There is some flexibility in terms of being able to move walls and so on in the building just because of that fact that it is, sort of, an ever-changing environment.

Those are two of the facts surrounding that building that should be on the table, anyway.

The Chair: I think the last question was with respect to the amount of space in the Legislature Building. I don't think we would be able to put 87 MLAs in there, but it's a discussion that, if members want to have, we can certainly have. I'm not sure if we have time today to have that deep of a discussion.

Ms Smith: Would the executive need space in both the Legislature and the federal building? I mean, when you've got an executive of 20 members, do they also need to have similarly sized office space in the Legislature? That would be the consideration. If we only have to accommodate 67 members because we've got 20 members of the executive, maybe it actually makes more sense to do a swap.

The Chair: Fair question.

I have one speaker left. Tom Lukaszuk.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Yes. While we're taking a comfort break, Mr. Speaker, may I see the minutes of this committee's previous meeting, granting the LAO the go-ahead to start the endeavour of full broadcasting and doing that entire expenditure with IT?

The Chair: Certainly. I know that since I've been chairing, all of our meetings are minuted in *Hansard*, and I assume that that was the practice. Allison, was it?

Ms Quast: Yeah, absolutely.

The Chair: So that's easily enough provided, Thomas. I don't know how far back they go, but, you know, we can do that.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Any other speakers? If not, then I'm going to have to pose the question here.

Mrs. Fritz: Are we voting on this now, Mr. Speaker, then, before the break, or after the break?

The Chair: That would be my request, to vote on it. If you don't wish to vote on it now, we can hold it off. But I thought we would just tidy it up.

Mrs. Fritz: I think that Thomas wanted to see *Hansard* first.

The Chair: Thomas, are you okay if we call for the vote now?

Ms Smith: Well, when do we make amendments to the budget line items?

The Chair: Well, any time now if you wish to make some amendments.

Ms Smith: Okay. Yeah. Well, maybe we should take a break because I've got three.

The Chair: Okay. Well, then, let's take a break because amendments tend to take a little longer.

All right. I have 9:46 on the clock. Let's resume at 10, shall we? That'll give everybody time to charge their coffee cups and have a comfort break. We'll start again sharp at 10 according to the clock behind me or what's on your cellphones.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 9:46 a.m. to 10 a.m.]

The Chair: Thank you, all. My cellphone reads 10 a.m., and I think the clock behind me reads 10 a.m., so we can reconvene.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chairman, all of us are feeling a bit uncomfortable about the budget ask. It's a new financial climate in Alberta. Ms Smith discussed the issue of \$43 oil. I think our caucuses individually would like to have an opportunity to take this proposal back to our respective caucuses, have a discussion about it, and defer the decision on this today. At your convenience, maybe in a week, we could reconvene to finalize the decision.

The Chair: Very good.

Yvonne Fritz.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to put on the record that I really appreciate today, oh, just the real thorough explanations that we've received all along through this budget. I can understand, you know, a number of the reasons why it's been put forward in this way.

You mentioned that we had, I think, 13 more members now that you're accommodating in the budget. We've got the changes with the federal building. We have infrastructure putting \$600,000, you know, now over to LAO for sound masking. I know that when Mrs. Scarlett talked about all of the good work that's been done, the tremendous effort to work toward what we most recently considered, which was the committee rooms and for the broadcasting, the consulting services, the installation, the staff that

have made just tremendous effort over the years, it sounds like to me, to put into place – you said that there was an accumulation of equipment that they've been acquiring and it's been on a consolidated basis, et cetera, and where we're moving toward with that, and you mentioned four committee rooms. I'm looking forward, Mr. Speaker, if Mr. VanderBurg's motion for deferral is supported, which I will definitely be supporting, that we will have a bit more – you know, I don't mean volumes – detail on the committee rooms and if some of those can be deferred, et cetera. I know that you know where we're going with this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. VanderBurg, did I hear you making a motion? Mrs. Fritz is referring to a motion. I'm not sure I heard a motion.

Mr. VanderBurg: Either one of us is fine. It's all the same intent.

The Chair: Why don't you just phrase it, and we'll get it on here. It was inferred, but I didn't actually . . .

Mr. VanderBurg: I make a motion that we defer decision on the LAO budget estimates before us until a further date determined by the Speaker.

The Chair: Fair enough.

On this case I will accept a seconder. Mrs. Fritz. Okay. Thank you.

Now let's debate that motion. On the motion, Ms Smith. Thank you.

Ms Smith: Yeah. I'll support the motion. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you would be disappointed if I didn't put on the record once again the issue that I put on the record every year, that I believe that this committee sets the tone for the rest of government. If we have increases that are beyond the level of inflation and population growth, that sends a bad message to other departments as they're deliberating the budget.

I've also in previous years expressed disappointment that we don't look at previous year actual inflation numbers. My observation of trying to project ahead what inflation is going to be is that it's always wrong, sometimes in the order of double or triple being wrong. If you look at the previous year's inflation, it was 1.8 per cent, so already the inflationary factor of 2 per cent built into this budget I believe overshoots what we're likely to see this year.

In addition, I would say that the Lieutenant Governor's throne speech had a line in there that I took great heart in, saying that the government would be looking at limiting year-over-year spending increases below inflation plus population growth, which is something that you may know, Mr. Chair, that I've been asking for for probably about a decade, going back to when I used to write for the *Calgary Herald*. If we had been able to manage the year-over-year increases within that parameter, we would not be facing deficits today, and we certainly would be able to weather \$43 oil in a way that we're not able to under current circumstances.

I would point out that House services has asked for a 13.43 per cent increase; visitor services, 9.7 per cent increase; human resources, 6.14 per cent; Legislature Library, 4.68 per cent; IT, 3.37 per cent; financial management, 2.55 per cent. I'll give some credit to legislative committees and the Speaker's office. Both of those actually do fall within the parameter of being below inflation plus population growth. But I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that any of these budgets, thinking that we're going to see a 13.43

per cent increase in revenue next year – if we're not going to see a 13.43 per cent increase in revenue, no department should be asking for that kind of increase in expenditures. I know from our experience in managing budget changes through the legislative office, through the constituency office, that you can make staffing changes. You can reallocate duties. You can choose to do less contracting out of labour. You can choose to do less advertising. There are lots and lots and lots of ways to be able to find efficiencies.

The motions that I was going to put forward would have affected not only the six areas that I discussed but also our own MLA offices in the constituencies. I think it's completely unacceptable that we would be thinking of, even contemplating, increasing those budgets by 8.94 per cent when I think that Mr. Hale pointed out quite rightly that there are a large number of MLAs who don't use their current allocation. Why would you increase if you don't have to?

In addition, just looking at the allocations for the Official Opposition and opposition budgets, a 5.8 per cent increase, I can tell you with certainty that I do not need a 5.8 per cent increase in the leader's office budget in the Official Opposition. I won't speak for the members from the other parties, but these projections, it seems to me, were put in place without any contemplation of the reality that we're facing. And we face a serious, serious financial reality.

I will support the deferral motion, but I hope that in the spirit of what I've discussed, we will come back with significant changes to each of these budget areas.

The Chair: Thank you. On that point I would be more than happy to meet with any of the members of the committee. Danielle, if you and Jason would like to get together with me and a couple of the officials to go through some of this in more detail, I'd be happy to do that.

The same thing over here with Mr. VanderBurg and Mrs. Fritz, you and other members of the government caucus if we want to get together and talk with some of the officials before we have the larger meeting of the whole committee.

Raj, I extend the same invitation to you and to Mr. Mason, who I know will be reading the minutes. We could certainly make some other, additional meetings available for understanding things better and so on, not that we don't understand them fairly well right now.

I do want to just say one thing, though, and that is that the LAO staff have done their best to provide us with information for this kind of discussion to occur. They apply the same formula that has been applied year after year after year. That is basically whatever decisions and obligations the government undertakes with AUPE, for example, tend to filter down to us. That's where some of the numbers come from. Now, I'm not saying that we have to follow that, but that's where the guidelines have always been. So that is a contextual piece.

Let us move on, then, to Mr. Hale.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the invitation to go through those budget line items in more detail.

I will be supporting Mr. VanderBurg's motion. When we look at what's happening now in our energy sector, there are going to be ripple effects. I think it's imperative that we as leaders in the Legislature show that we are willing to make some sacrifices also. It's never pleasant making those sorts of decisions, but I think it's up to us to lead by example.

You know, we'll definitely take you up on your offer and go through those items and, you know, see where we can make some cuts to this budget to keep it within line.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak to the motion made by Mr. VanderBurg, seconded by Mrs. Fritz? Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: A question, Mr. Speaker. You need clear direction from us to do your planning in order to run the halls of democracy here. What is your timeline for the approval of the budget so you can do your planning and for you to do your planning so that we can do our planning with our staffing and so on?

The Chair: That's a very good question. Typically we like to try to have our budget put to bed by the end of December, and we like to get it in to the Treasury people within the first couple of weeks of January so that we can make the printing. Remember that this is really important, and I'm grateful for all the comments that everybody has made because once we agree on what the budget is going to be, it basically goes through the House quite quickly thereafter. So this is the place to have this in-depth discussion.

I think we're all acutely aware of the problems right now with oil prices and with other factors looming, so everybody is welcoming a breather. That's the sense that I am getting from the committee members.

Are we ready for the question, then? On Mr. VanderBurg's motion, yes.

Raj, are you okay with the answer?

Dr. Sherman: Yeah.

The Chair: So we're looking at the middle of January at the latest, probably.

10:10

Dr. Sherman: Okay. Lastly, just a comment. I think most of us were pretty happy with the way things were. The government made a decision years ago. Much of the increases here are due to exceptional circumstances: the security costs, the downloading costs, and many one-time expenses that I see as increases in the budget. I would urge and caution all members. You know, the Speaker has done a good job with his budget, and MLAs personally don't have any extra funds. Most of this is for front-line staff to run the Legislative Assembly. If you're going to defer or delay, the costs may be more.

I personally would like analysis of the delays in construction and delays in moving once a decision was made, what that has actually cost us. I just caution everyone in making their decision with their caucuses that certain expenses are fixed. You've explained them very adequately here. You know, you don't want to be cutting security.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Seeing no other speakers, then, let me call the question on Mr. VanderBurg's motion, which Ms Quast will read aloud to us as best she has it phrased. We'll check *Hansard* to get the exact wording.

Ms Quast: Moved by Mr. VanderBurg that the vote on the 2015-16 Legislative Assembly estimates be deferred to a later date.

The Chair: Basically, that captures the essence of it. We'll check *Hansard* to be sure. Those in favour of that motion should raise

their hands, I guess. It's the quickest way. Any opposed? So that is a unanimously carried vote.

Thank you very much. We'll get back to you.

Mr. Hale, I will follow up with you and Ms Smith.

Mr. VanderBurg and Ms Fritz, if you want to follow up with me and a couple of senior members to get some details hammered out before the larger MSC meeting, I'd be happy to do that.

Mr. VanderBurg: I will make a commitment to you, Mr. Speaker, that we will deal with this in a timely fashion.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

That concludes that item for now, and we'll get back to you as soon as we can with a suitable date. One would hope to do it within the week, but I won't promise that. It just depends on how other things go is what I'm gathering.

That being said, I want to move over to new business. Item 4(a) I think will also likely be deferred because it's a budget type item as well. But I will highlight it for the purposes of MLAs Mike Allen and Hon. Don Scott, both of whom are located with their constituency offices in Fort McMurray. They have sent a letter dated February 18, 2014, to me and in turn through me to all of you requesting consideration of a change in their designation from rural to urban. There are some cost implications with that. With your concurrence I would defer discussion on this item to the same meeting that is referred to in Mr. VanderBurg's motion. Are we agreed? Thank you.

Item 4(c). That item is before you as well, and this, too, has some budget implications. But in fairness to the member who raised it – and in this case I should say that she's the first one to raise it in writing to my attention. Others have mentioned it to me verbally. If you refer to the letter sent by Ms Pastoor to me on April 8, 2014 – there's a copy of that in your binder. There's a copy of my reply to Ms Pastoor dated May 1. That, too, being budget related, I would suggest that we postpone debate on that until the appropriate time as it has monetary implications. Are we agreed? Thank you very much.

Finally, the request from Dr. Sherman. This one is something that we've had under consideration for quite some time, and in fact every time an amendment happens to any of our orders, we automatically update it for gender neutrality, so to speak. We would continue doing that. But I wonder, Dr. Sherman, did you want to say something in addition to that since it's your issue for the moment at least?

Dr. Sherman: Well, basically, Mr. Speaker, as you know, if we have an opportunity to amend things and bring everything in line with 2014, it's important to replace the word "his" with "his or her." We've had a female Premier. We have a lady as Leader of the Official Opposition and many hon. members who are men and women. I think it would be a good time to amend this order to make it gender neutral and include the word "spouse" instead of "husband" and "wife" with the human rights realities that exist today in Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have a copy of Dr. Sherman's letter to me dated May 8 in your binders. This is an ongoing project, and we do it consequentially and otherwise. We're updating it every chance that we get. Okay?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

The Chair: Let us move on then. Under old business: members' travel. This is actually with respect to professional development

conferences, which we've had quite a good discussion on. Let me just mention for everybody's review that every year we do publish a magazine that looks like this. I realize *Hansard* can't see it, but you're all familiar with it. In here is a statement on several pages that covers all the conferences to which I as Speaker send delegates. These are professional development conferences and seminars. There are several of them. Further to what I mentioned earlier, I did send 26 delegates in 2012-13 to attend such conferences. In 2013-14 I sent 28, and in the current year I've reduced that to 23. So we're paring down where we can, and, as David mentioned, the location of some of these conferences also impacts some of our budgets quite significantly.

Please be reminded that I always send out a list to all private members with respect to which conferences are occurring, when, and where. Then I ask MLAs to write back to me and say which ones they're interested in attending. In some cases some MLAs aren't interested in attending any, or their schedule just doesn't permit them to attend, so we put them in the hopper, so to speak, with an invitation for the following year. If circumstances change for some members, then we offer it to whoever is next in line based on certain factors. I was asked to comment and update you on that, so that's the update.

Any questions on 5(a)? Nope. None. Okay. Thank you.

Let's move on to 5(b), the meal per diems beyond 60 kilometres of residence. There is a comment here that I wrote to all of you on

June 12, 2014. This, too, has some financial implications here. I don't know if we should defer discussion on this one as well because of that or if you want to have a chat on it now. Would you prefer if we did all the financial stuff on the deferred-to date? Yes? Okay. So if there's committee agreement – and I see that there is – then we'll defer discussion on this item as well.

Is there any other business to come before this committee? Anybody? Going once. Going twice. Three times. Gone. Thank you.

We'll get a motion for adjournment in a moment. Before we do, though, I just want to be clear that I will queue up the meetings that I said with some of you individually by caucus over the next week or so, and then I'll solicit some dates for the next meeting, at which we would discuss and decide on a budget that we're all comfortable with going forward to the Assembly. Are we agreed with that approach?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We are agreed. That being the case, we have a motion for adjournment from Mr. Hale. All in favour of the adjournment motion? Agreed. Any opposed? None. We stand adjourned at 10:21. Thank you all very much. This has been a very good meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 10:21 a.m.]

