



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, December 22, 2014
10:30 a.m.

Transcript No. 28-3-2

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Third Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Chair
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 (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL)

Also in Attendance

Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (Ind)

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Allison Quast	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Bev Alenius	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Danielle Golob	Special Assistant to the Speaker
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations
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Stephanie LeBlanc	Legal Research Officer
Brian G. Hodgson	Sergeant-at-Arms
Al Chapman	Manager, Visitor Services
Cheryl Scarlett	Director of Human Resources, Information Technology and Broadcast Services
Jillian Tilley	Manager, IT Operations
Lyndsay Tischer	Manager, Human Resource Services
Scott Ellis	Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Jacqueline Breault	Manager, Corporate Services, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Valerie Footz	Legislature Librarian
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

10:30 a.m. Monday, December 22, 2014

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning. I show it as 10:30 a.m., so we'd like to start this meeting provided we have a quorum.

Let me go around the room here first of all and see who's here and get this meeting rolling. Gene Zwozdesky here as chair. To my left . . .

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

Mr. Anglin: Joe Anglin, MLA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Hale: Jason Hale, MLA, Strathmore-Brooks.

The Chair: Joining us online, do we have Yvonne Fritz?

Mrs. Fritz: Yes. Good morning, everyone.

The Chair: Sign in, please.

Mrs. Fritz: Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross.

The Chair: Thank you.
Do we have Ms Johnson?

Ms L. Johnson: Yes. Good morning. Linda Johnson, Calgary-Glenmore.

The Chair: Is there anyone else online that is a voting member of the Members' Services Committee? If there is, please sign in now.

Mr. McDonald: Good morning. It's Everett McDonald, MLA, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have three members online and four members, including myself, here in person. We are still expecting Dr. Sherman, who replied in the affirmative to attend in person. We're also expecting Mr. Brian Mason to attend in person. We have not heard from MLA Lukaszuk or from MLA Griffiths directly, so we don't know their whereabouts. They may be on their way, or they may be planning to sign in by telephone. We don't yet know. We did hear from Mrs. Forsyth, who, regrettably, is not able to attend the meeting, neither in person nor by telephone, and neither is she able to send a sub. So that's where we're at.

Just to refresh everyone's memory, please be reminded that under our Standing Order 56(2.1)

a temporary substitution in the membership of a standing or special committee may be made upon written notification signed by the original Member and filed with the Clerk and Committee Chair, provided such notice is given not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting.

That is what is governing us today.

I see that we are being joined by another esteemed member of the committee, who is now being seated and will sign himself in accordingly.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Good morning.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're able to proceed. We have three members on the telephone. There we are.

We are looking at the agenda. The meeting has been called to order. There are no housekeeping items. Could I have a motion to approve the agenda?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I just want to, not for today's discussion but for future discussion under new business, make note of an item as MLA medical plans.

The Chair: MLA medical plans?

Mr. VanderBurg: Or member medical plans: that is probably the right wording.

The Chair: Member medical, yes. Medical plans for members. We would add that under new business, and it likely would be tabled from today for a future date.

Mr. VanderBurg: Yeah. That's all I wanted, just to get it noted that I want in a future meeting to talk about it.

The Chair: Right. That small change to the agenda is noted.

Could I then have a motion to accept the agenda as amended? I see nobody wanting to move a motion. Mr. Hale?

Mr. Hale: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Hale has moved it. Those in favour should say aye. Those opposed should say no. Thank you.

We also note the attendance, from a minute or two ago, of another esteemed member of the committee. Dr. Sherman, would you like to sign in, please?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Raj Sherman, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're off and rolling. You have before you the minutes of the December 9 meeting. Could I get a motion to accept those minutes, please?

Mr. VanderBurg: So moved.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. VanderBurg to accept those minutes. Those in favour should say aye. Those opposed should say no. Accordingly, that is carried unanimously.

We have one major item of old business, that being the revised Legislative Assembly budget estimates, which we're going to plunge straight into. Then we have three other items that are carried forward, and I'm going to suggest that those items might need to be carried forward again – that's items 4(b), (c), and (d) – unless there is sufficient time later to get into them. The reason that I'm suggesting that they be carried forward is, number one, because we haven't yet had a chance to sit down and meet in person with the people advancing those items, and I would very much like to do that. Secondly, there may be some financial repercussions there, but we have to investigate those further, and it's been a very busy couple of weeks, and we've just simply not had an opportunity to do so.

That being said, let us move on with item 4(a). Am I correct?

Ms Quast: Yes.

The Chair: The revised Legislative Assembly budget estimates. I want to begin by saying a special thank you to the staff at LAO, who worked very hard since December 9 to prepare these revised estimates for us. I have a few opening comments I'd like to make in that respect. When we last met, on December 9, we reviewed

what I will call the first draft of the proposed budget as prepared by our LAO staff for LAO operations for 2015-16. After a very thorough presentation and discussion on December 9, it was generally agreed that more work needed to be done in order to take into greater account the fiscal realities that loom on the horizon for all Albertans, including this committee.

I have since met with and worked very closely with LAO staff and several senior officials, at least three or more times I should say, and reviewed all aspects of the revised, or second, draft budget, which was sent out or made available to everybody on Friday afternoon. As discussed on December 9, I also met with representatives of all four caucuses to receive more of their input and to apprise them of the developments in case they were unable to be with us on December 9. I also heard from numerous other MLAs, and I did touch base with the independent MLA, Joe Anglin, who is joining us here today in person.

In a nutshell, here are some of the actions that have been taken with respect to the LAO budget after the gist of the direction given to us on December 9 by the Members' Services Committee. First of all, the projected 2 per cent general inflation rate increase, that would normally have been applied to LAO branch budgets where warranted, has been totally eliminated everywhere. That's the 2 per cent general inflationary factor. In other words, there won't be any increase in the LAO's budget for general inflation costs, and it has been eliminated as well from the parameters that are reflected in the overview at the very beginning of your new binder.

Secondly, it has been reiterated to everyone that the market adjustment of 2.25 per cent for all employees that we refer to as Alberta public service employees will be budgeted for, as it was on December 9, since the LAO sector follows the lead of whatever is decided upon or negotiated by, if you will, the government of Alberta and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the AUPE. The same applies in relation to the up to 3 per cent maximum in-range merit adjustment for those employees who are eligible to receive it, and that includes staff working here in Edmonton as well as staff working in the constituency offices throughout Alberta.

With respect to MLA administration budgets, MLA pay, or what is referred to in the documents before you as MLA indemnity, it will remain frozen for, I believe, the fourth consecutive time, including two years prior to the major report of 2013. Similarly, all MLA benefit plans, including health benefits and the individual retirement investment option, remain frozen with no increases.

Regarding constituency office budgets, the following changes, reductions if you will, have been made. The MSA constituency office element has been trimmed of its projected 2 per cent inflation factor for both office operations and for office supplies. In other words, neither of those two areas will be receiving any inflationary increases.

10:40

Similarly, our budget includes the provision for 10 more private members, who are reflected here – and they were also reflected on December 9 – in order to account for the 10 cabinet positions that were eliminated when the new Premier took charge. A similar factor has just been included here to reflect nine more private members being added to the government side because of developments last week. Finally, we've made some significant reductions to the federal building plans, where we hope to see all MLAs moving sometime next year, and that resulted in some significant reductions, which we'll get into shortly.

In summary, on the cost containment side, given the fiscal realities that loom, we have reduced MLA administration by

approximately \$255,000 so far, we have reduced the federal building expenses by approximately \$500,000 or \$600,000 or thereabouts, we have eliminated the 2 per cent inflation increases everywhere, we have frozen MLA pay, and we have not filled any imminent vacancies that may have arisen. When we look at the necessary increases, that being the other side of the ledger, LAO branches must receive an increase for their staff in the amount of \$894,000. I say "must" because we follow the agreement, again, signed by AUPE and the government. Caucus budgets reflect that they are to increase by about a million dollars.

When push comes to shove, given some other numbers that will be surfaced here shortly, we have trimmed our budget by several percentage points, to the degree where we are now looking at, if there is such a thing, a negative increase. When we compare the 2014-15 budget with the projected new budget, which is before you, you will see that we have reduced expenditures by about 0.72 or 0.74 per cent.

Those are my opening comments.

Now we can go directly into the budget unless someone else has some general comments they wish to make before we do so. Is there anybody? Mr. VanderBurg.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank your staff and all those that have worked so hard to trim the proposed budget from \$72.3 million to \$68.5 million. I know that's not an easy task, and I know that there are consequences every time that we reduce a budget, but I think that in the fiscal times that we're in, we all agree that we need to show some constraint and some leadership, and this committee can provide that.

Of special note, I think that we still have some work to do, and I'd like to ask you and your committee to do some more work on a number of items. I can discuss those items as we go through the budget, or I can discuss them ahead of time. It's up to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Well, is there a particular tab that you're referring to in your thinking?

Mr. VanderBurg: A number of them.

The Chair: Okay. Why don't we just start at the beginning, then, and where your comments are relevant, you'll be free to make them, as will other members. I think that we want to go through this all fairly carefully, obviously, because we are the sounding board for all 87 Members of the Legislative Assembly, and what we agree on here to advance typically is what the House accepts without too much discussion. So we won't be shortchanging anybody of their opportunity. Thank you for your comments, Mr. VanderBurg. They're much appreciated.

Let me turn to the parameters. If you, basically, take a look at the parameters document, which is the overview, it summarizes what I have already summarized, but I'd be happy to receive any questions. We have a number of other people who are here to help answer them. While you're finding that page, I'll just have other members sign in so that we know who is here helping us out.

Let's start with Mr. Reynolds to sign in, please.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Law Clerk and director of inter-parliamentary relations.

Ms Golob: Danielle Golob, Speaker Zwozdesky's office.

Ms Breault: Jacqueline Breault, manager of corporate services with the FMAS branch.

Mr. Ellis: Scott Ellis, director of financial management and administrative services with the LAO.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a number of other staff who are sitting at the back. Since we have room here, why don't we just invite you up to the table so that you're handier and the microphone is right at your fingertips. As you do so, please sign in.

Let's start with our Sergeant-at-Arms. If you would sign in, please.

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

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

Ms Footz: Valerie Footz, Legislature Librarian.

Ms Tischer: Lyndsay Tischer, manager, human resource services.

Ms Tilley: Jillian Tilley, manager of IT operations.

Ms LeBlanc: Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and legal research officer.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That rounds out our table of officials combined with MLAs for the morning.

MLAs from the committee, are there any observations you have about the overview parameter sheet?

If not, we'll go straight to tab 1.

Ms Quast: Mr. Speaker, we're just getting that copied for the members. They don't have it.

The Chair: Oh, they don't have that yet? Well, there's nothing new on it that I haven't already covered, so we'll get that out to you. If you have your binder from December 9 handy, you will know that there's an overview sheet that contains the parameters and, basically, reflects everything I said in my opening comments anyway. We'll get that circulated to you, and we'll just move on.

Let us go to the general estimates sheet, which is the estimates summary. It's your second tab. Here we see what the last approximately two weeks of work by the LAO managers and staff have resulted in. You will note here that the bottom line for us is that we're going from a total voted expenditure in 2014-15 of \$69,415,000 down to a total voted expenditure proposed for your consideration for 2015-16 in the amount of \$68,904,000, which reflects an overall decrease from the current budget to the projected budget of \$511,000, or 0.74 per cent.

Are there any questions with respect to the general sheet? If not, we'll get into all the details that follow. Anybody on the telephones? Hearing none, anybody in person?

Hearing none, let us move on, then, to tab 1, financial management and administrative services. On this particular tab under the first item is human resource expenses. We've been through this. These figures have not changed since December 9, and given my opening comments about the 2.25 per cent, the AUPE agreement, and so on, they're not expected to change either. With respect to the travel budget you will note that there has been a reduction of \$2,000 in line 1. There has been a reduction in the telecommunications figure in line 4 under operational expenses, down by a thousand bucks as well. We have a total expected vote here of \$1.643 million. Is there anyone with any question with regard to this tab 1? If not, we can go on to tab 2 then. Thank you. It doesn't mean we can't come back, but at least we'll get through it all.

Let's move on to tab 2, human resource services. Again, there's no change in the top half. The human resource expenses are the same here because we're talking again about LAO staff who work in the human resource services area. When we look at the operational expenses, we see no change until line 3, where the office equipment rental/purchase is going up by \$1,000.

Does anyone have a question about that? Scott, did you have something?

10:50

Mr. Ellis: I think those numbers there are the December 9 numbers, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's the same thing. Yeah. My typo here. My apologies. Line 3 stays the same. Thank you. It's stays at \$59,000 – right? – projected expenditure for office equipment.

Mr. Ellis: If I could maybe just come up and show you what I mean in your binder.

The Chair: Please do.

I'll carry on. I'm just comparing what the committee saw on December 9 to what they're getting now. Under other labour and services we see a reduction there from \$66,000 on December 9 down to \$36,000 today. Under advertising our new binder shows a \$31,000 expenditure compared with a \$40,000 projected expenditure back on December 9.

At the end of the day, our total expected estimate for 2015-16 is \$2,052,000 compared with \$2,092,000 back on December 9.

Are there any questions on the human resource services page? Good so far? Thank you.

Let's move on to tab 3, then, in the new binder. Tab 3 is the Speaker's office. We went through this the other day, and there are no changes here, so I'm assuming that we're good with the reduction in costs reflected there.

Are there any questions regarding tab 3?

Mr. Mason: There's no application of an increase here. Is that because all the employees are out of scope? Why is that?

The Chair: No. What we have is a change in one or two staff members who were at a much higher rate. That's reflected in *Hansard* from the December 9 meeting. There's no need to reflect an increase because it's an in-house accommodation, if you will.

Mr. Mason: So it nets out exactly?

The Chair: Yeah. Well, it comes out with a thousand dollars less at the end of the day. Okay?

Mr. Mason: Okay. Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else or on the telephones for tab 3?

Hearing no one, let us move to tab 4, please. Tab 4, of course, is our library service. The top category, Human Resource Expenses, shows a reduction in line 1. It was projected at \$1,544,000. It's now projected down to \$1,520,000. Is that right, Val? That's correct? Okay. Thank you.

Any questions there?

Ms L. Johnson: If my memory serves me right, there were staff off on maternity leave, and they're coming back. That's why there was a change? When the presentation came last week on December 9, there was a \$100,000 increase. Was that a change of

staff coming back from maternity leave, or was it additional full-time staff?

The Chair: Yeah. That's what predicated the change. There were some part-time staff who had come in to relieve people who were on maternity leave.

Val, do you wish to comment further?

Ms Footz: We had people who were away due to child care necessity, and they have now come back full-time, so we have accordingly reduced our part-time cover-off that we needed in order to continue our services. We have reduced that. We still end up being like the status quo, but we're back to a normal staffing complement now, which should be stable going forward.

Ms L. Johnson: How many full-time staff are in the library?

Ms Footz: We're at 22 FTEs.

Ms L. Johnson: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Anyone else?

Mr. VanderBurg: We were at 20 FTEs before?

Ms Footz: No. Overall, we stayed at 22, but then with the part-time changes back to the full-time, it ends up being a stable number.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. So the part-time won't be brought in this year.

Ms Footz: No, it won't.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. That makes sense, then.

The Chair: Yeah. It's actually showing a small increase to accommodate that factor.

Okay. Anything else on the top 3 lines? No?

Let us move to the expenses item, then. We were forecasting \$810,000 to keep the pace of the previous year. That has since been reduced to \$796,000.

Val, can you just tell us briefly where the reduction has occurred and why?

Ms Footz: We reduced our office equipment rental and purchase by \$5,000. That was due to – we, again, just won't be replacing some obsolete equipment, so we were able to cut that down. Our telecommunications plan had changed, so again we were able to reduce that by \$3,000. Equipment repairs and maintenance: because we have fewer pieces of specialized library equipment to maintain, we don't need the maintenance agreements for those, so that's been able to be cut. We are cutting hosting by \$2,000, and that's mainly for water. There's no plumbing or anything in the library proper, so we have a water cooler that's there for staff and so on. Office administration and supplies we have cut by \$5,000. We will just purchase fewer supplies. Again, we might not spend that much. It depends on the federal building move and how supplies are co-ordinated and so on.

We have retained our increase of periodicals and newspapers just because of inflation, and we want to keep as many community papers from the different constituencies and current events and those kinds of things in the library as possible. That also covers services that are more irregular publications. We don't always know how many issues will be issued during that fiscal year, so we keep that in.

Then we have decreased our audiovisual by \$2,000, and that was mainly for public performance rates for DVDs that we have in our collection. There is a new database that has become available to us called films on demand. It has a number of things that everybody can access through the web, so we don't need to purchase as much.

The Chair: Thank you, Val.

Are there any other questions on this tab to do with the library?

Mr. VanderBurg: Yeah. On the electronic products: is it by contract that it stays the same, or if we said, you know, that you need to reduce that budget, you'd just purchase fewer electronic products?

Ms Footz: Yeah. That's basically database subscriptions, so it's like magazine subscriptions, where we have to pay a year in advance in order to get it. If we were to cut this budget, it wouldn't necessarily become effective right away, like on April 1. It depends on when in the year the subscription has come up. Because we are asking for a zero increase, we will most likely lose a couple of databases anyhow, but again, if directed, we will do what you need to do and prioritize and cut what we need to.

Mr. VanderBurg: I just get comments from members saying, you know, that with the electronic age they're using the library less, and the budget doesn't reflect that. I don't know if that's true or not. Maybe you could give me some idea?

Ms Footz: Again, what we're doing is that we're putting our resources in the desktop delivery service. It's true; we are getting fewer members coming into the library physically. But we are serving at about the same level in terms of the complexity of questions that we're getting. So even if the members are not using those databases directly, the library staff are in order to serve all the members. A lot of our databases are about public policy, news, Conference Board. A lot of those services that we deal with are there. We subscribe to those on behalf of members and their staff.

Mr. VanderBurg: Right. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other questions on the library?

Hearing none, let us move on, then, to the next tab, number 5, which is House services. You will note that the revised estimate here is from \$6,228,000 currently up to \$6,570,000 to reflect the 2.25 per cent, which refers to the public-sector compensation agreed to by the government.

No questions on the top half? Let us move to the bottom half. Operational expenses: we have here a reduction from what was projected back on December 9, and again it shows an increase here of about 2 per cent in the operational side of things. This would be Brian Hodgson. Perhaps he could give us a couple of highlights as to what is reflected here.

11:00

Mr. Hodgson: Well, we reduced our calculations based on the number of sitting days and the addition of five part-time Legislative Assembly security service staff as a result of the security enhancements that we've seen around the Legislature Building.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mason: What are we on, Mr. Speaker? Pardon me.

The Chair: We're on the next tab, tab 5.

Mr. Mason: Which is? I don't have it tabbed.

The Chair: You don't have a tab 5?

Mr. Mason: Well, I just have it photocopied.

The Chair: House services. On the top it should say House services.

Mr. Mason: Yes, I have it.

The Chair: You don't have that either?

Mr. Mason: Yes, I have it right here.

The Chair: Oh, good.

Mr. Mason: I was just asking where we were, because I was not seeing what we were talking about in this list.

The Chair: Yeah. Sorry. I put my thing together in the form of tabs because it coincides with what was handed out prior to the December 9 meeting, and some people are following both binders. Anyway, are we good, Brian?

Mr. Mason: I have some questions.

The Chair: You have a question. Go ahead and then Dr. Sherman.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I am curious about some of the increases in this budget. Forgive me if the Sergeant-at-Arms was referring to these increases in his answer, but I just want to connect it. There's an increase in office equipment rental and purchase; other labour and services; a significant increase in office administration and supplies; data-processing equipment, a \$6,000 line; and an increase of \$20,000 in conferences. Maybe we can get some explanations for this list.

The Chair: I just want to make it clear that Brian Hodgson addresses a part of this House services budget, but there are others who deal with other parts.

So let's go one at a time, Brian. Are we okay on line 1, travel, from your perspective?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. The first one I had question on was just the increases here, which is office equipment rental and purchase.

The Chair: Yeah. Office equipment and rental. This has something to do with the CTV contract, and we're trying to get that amended.

In any event, does anybody here have more detail to that? Scott, do you have a quick comment that you'd like to make?

Mr. Ellis: Sure, Mr. Speaker. The primary increase – is this in office equipment?

The Chair: Line 3 of operational expenses, yes.

Mr. Ellis: The bulk of that is in the communications area, and I'm just going to go to the detail to see if I can provide any more information. There was a \$10,000 increase in the communications area. It's for a one-time purchase of an industrial paper cutter in the communications area. Does that help?

The Chair: Okay, Brian?

Mr. Mason: Are you cutting more paper these days?

Mr. Ellis: I'm not working in that particular branch. I'm not sure, but I think it was a matter of the old one packing it in and needing a replacement.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Replacement it is, then. Thank you. Brian, your next point.

Mr. Mason: Other labour and services.

The Chair: Other labour and services.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. There's an increase there.

The Chair: An increase of \$16,000 projected. Scott, do you happen to have some information on that, other labour and services, going from \$1,012,000 up to \$1,028,000?

Mr. Ellis: The primary impact there is in the communications area.

The Chair: What does that mean?

Mr. Ellis: It means that they went up by \$55,000 in the other labour and services due to the potential, I guess, of hiring additional outside people other than employees to assist in the communications efforts going into the new federal building.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Brian, are you okay with that?

Mr. Mason: Okay.

Mr. VanderBurg: I just need a correction. You said \$1.028 million. That was December 4. I'm working on December 19, that says \$1.068 million.

The Chair: Yeah. You're quite right. Sorry. I've got the two binders mixed up here, George. Thank you. Yeah. It's going from \$1,012,000 up to \$1,068,000. Thanks for pointing that out. On that line item, Brian.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Just a question, Mr. Speaker, and I thank Dr. Sherman for bringing this to my attention. You went back after the first budget was put in to try and find some savings, but this line item has been increased from the first budget, that was before it. So I'm just curious about that. There's another \$50,000 over and above what was originally proposed.

The Chair: Scott, do you happen to have that information handy?

Mr. Ellis: The explanation is that there was \$80,000 taken out of a salary position, so the net effect is a \$30,000 reduction, although it does appear in two different places.

Mr. Mason: Sorry. I'm not following.

Mr. Ellis: They've reduced their salary in communications by \$80,000, and they added in other labour and services for the contracting of the additional assistance that they needed. So the net effect in their overall budget is a reduction of \$30,000.

Mr. Mason: Okay. So you're contracting a position, and the contract is here, and the staff reduction is at the top?

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

Mr. Mason: Okay. That's good.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Mason: If we can just skip down, Mr. Speaker, to conferences. There's a \$20,000 increase in conferences. Why? Have we got a big conference coming? What's that all about?

The Chair: This is not the IT conference, is it, Jillian? It's not the library. So which one is this, Scott?

Mr. Ellis: No. This is related to broadcasting, and there's a group of broadcasters from all of the different jurisdictions across the country, and they are meeting in Edmonton this year. Typically, every year it moves around to a different jurisdiction, and basically it's our turn to host. So it does move around to all the jurisdictions, and there's been a budget of \$20,000 established for that particular conference.

Mr. Mason: Sorry. How are we broadcasters?

Mr. Ellis: We do have broadcasting capabilities in the Chamber.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Does this necessitate a conference?

Mr. Ellis: Pardon me?

Mr. Mason: I guess I'm just wondering: how critical is this conference?

The Chair: Let's go to Rob Reynolds for an answer.

Mr. Reynolds: It's an interparliamentary organization that exists to exchange information between broadcasters, amongst broadcasters across Canada – like, there's a parliamentary counsels conference; there's a clerks conference – and it's just our turn to host this one.

Mr. Mason: Oh, it's specific to legislative . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Yes, yes.

Mr. Mason: If it was just broadcasters, I thought that, like, maybe CTV could pick up the tab.

Mr. Reynolds: No, no. They're not talking about *The Big Bang Theory* or anything; they're talking about broadcasting Assemblies. So that's what it is. It's the people who broadcast – and communications people are responsible for that – from all of the jurisdictions across Canada.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. It's just our turn to host it. That's it.

Mr. Mason: Sure. Okay.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. VanderBurg: I agree with Mr. Mason that, you know, we need to look at our conferences and hosting and travel budgets, but we also have to be aware that from time to time we do host. Everybody takes turns hosting, and these are issues that we should be aware of when we're looking at our conferences. As we go through the tabs, I have no issue with reducing or reviewing the methods by which we send representation. You know, rather than four people maybe it should be two people or three people. But we have to be mindful of the commitments that your office has made

to hosting these events and to make sure that we keep participating in the major conferences going forward. So I'll be talking about future tabs as well, but that explanation sits well with me.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mason, are you finished with your questions?

Mr. Mason: I am, and I'm quite satisfied with that answer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: You know, I'm not really on a huge cost-cutting bender here.

The Chair: No, but clarification is always good, and you sought it, and you've received it, I hope.

11:10

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to jump up to human resource expenses. Last week when we talked, the budget went from \$4,975,000 to \$5,770,000. I see that that figure has been reduced by \$513,000 to \$5,264,000. Now, last week we questioned: why such a big jump? The justification, I think, was security and protection of the Legislative Assembly. This is a major, major decrease, \$513,000, in the human services resource expenses for House services. I'd like an explanation of that, please.

The Chair: Somebody have it handy?

Mr. Hodgson: I can speak briefly to the security part of that, and perhaps Scott can add to the other aspects of it. We reduced our original estimate of what it would cost for four Legislative Assembly security service staff by \$100,000.

Dr. Sherman: But this is a \$513,000 decrease from last week's estimate.

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. I can't speak to the balance of that; perhaps Scott can. But that's the reduction we made within the security service.

The Chair: Thank you.

That explains about \$100,000. The rest, Scott?

Mr. Ellis: Actually, I think there was more in the security area. My understanding is that it's \$250,000. We had \$350,000. It went down to \$100,000. However, there are two other positions that were cancelled in House services as well, one, that we previously mentioned, in the communications area. That was \$80,000. We also reduced the number of broadcasting staff. We had asked for a broadcasting person, and we took it out. So all those things in combination came to the total that you're looking for.

The Chair: Okay.

Other parts of the House services budget?

Dr. Sherman: That was it. It's significant. I just wanted a detailed explanation of that \$513,000 decrease.

The Chair: Would you like more than what's been offered?

Dr. Sherman: Oh, more detail would be appreciated. One, if we didn't need it, how come so much was budgeted, presented before us last week? I'd like that explanation.

The Chair: Perhaps we could undertake to get that explanation after the comfort break, Scott, just so that we can deal with it today and, hopefully, move on.

Are there any other questions from Dr. Sherman or anyone else regarding House services?

Ms L. Johnson: Mr. Chair, I had a question.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Ms L. Johnson: Periodicals and newspapers. There's \$5,000 in House services and \$140,000 over at the library. Are there some efforts made to share copies and access to online subscriptions?

The Chair: Val, do you have an answer? I know that it's not your direct area, but how does that sharing of periodicals and newspapers happen in a general sense?

Ms Footz: I believe that those are for daily newspapers that are shared amongst everybody in the Annex building, and the subscriptions that we get in the library are in the Leg. Building, I'm assuming.

Ms L. Johnson: Okay.

The Chair: Jacquie, is that your understanding as well? Do you know? Scott is looking up something else, so I'm going to you.

Ms Breault: It could be that, and I suspect that there may be some specialized publications that the table officers may need as hard copies, that might not be as easy to use in an electronic format. That would be my supposition.

The Chair: Rob Reynolds.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. Just to follow up, Jacqueline's right. Ms Johnson, I think, if it's any consolation, we tend to look at these things more electronically now rather than the hard-copy versions, so the subscription rates have gone down, but there are a few documents that we do still rely on. Occasionally we get newspapers over in the Annex, and that's what the subscription is. As Jacqueline said, there are a few specialized parliamentary journals that we get, and while the figure hasn't increased from last year, the subscription rates have because some of them are British, some Canadian. There are only, you know, three or four for the table officers. That accounts for the figure.

Ms L. Johnson: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other questions with respect to House services?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, before we go to passing the budget towards the end, can we get a detailed explanation of that \$513,000, as to how many positions are being eliminated, where they are? We've heard from the Sergeant-at-Arms, but that doesn't account for that big of a cut from last week's estimate.

The Chair: Yeah. I believe Scott is going to try and get somebody on this during the comfort break, so hopefully we'll have it before the end. I've indicated that earlier, and I'll reiterate it again. Thank you.

Any other questions?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I don't know if I agree with the terminology of "cut" that Mr. Sherman has used. It was a reduction of the increase. You know, the proposed increase – the 2015-16 budget was \$5.7 million, and it's gone down to \$5.2 million, but last year it was \$4.9 million, so I don't look at it as a cut of staff. I look at it as a cut of the proposed increase.

The Chair: It's actually a \$289,000 dollar increase, which is mostly 2.25 per cent probably . . .

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, if we're going to debate this, I have to respond to this because the justification was that we're moving over to the federal building and there's going to be more staff needed and more security required in light of the horrific incident that happened at the Parliament building. It's a cut from what you had presented to us, and you had given rationale as to why we needed this extra money. It's for the security and the extra services when we move over there, for the extra staff. Yes, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne is correct in that's not a cut compared to last year's budget, when we didn't have the security issues, when we weren't moving. But from what you requested, it's a major cut from last week.

The Chair: Why don't we just wait until we get the details as requested and agreed to twice already. Let's just do that and move on, and then we'll have all the answers we need. Agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Anyone else, then, on this particular House services budget estimate?

Hearing none, let us move on to the next item, 6, which will be the visitor services. We show a bottom line here of a small increase. Well, I shouldn't say small. It's about \$110,000, isn't it? Thereabouts. Mr. Chapman, is this your area? Would you like to comment on some of the highlights here? I note that there's been quite a reduction in the overall estimate in the top half from where we were at on December 9. Perhaps you could start there.

Mr. Chapman: Sure. We were looking at with the new building increased space on the main floor, so the new store and the gallery, theatre, and permanent gallery. We were looking at having staff on there to work in those areas. We've since relocated at it and shifted staff, redeployed them from the building up to the other building. So we'll be changing around our schedules for tours. We'll look at what our focus is for tours in the main building, in the Leg. Building, and in redeploying staff up to there so we're not looking for additional part-time staff, which is what we were looking at in the original budget last week.

The Chair: This is a good thing from the standpoint of a budget that's under stress.

Mr. Chapman: It is. It's what you talked about earlier with a change in services. Some members will see a change in services for things such as PSO tours, public service orientation tours, and just drop-in VIP tours. When they used to be able to just pick up the phone and say, "I want a tour today," some of those things will no longer be available. We'll focus on educational tours and book tours and public drop-in.

The Chair: I note a reduction in your travel estimate as well . . .

Mr. Chapman: Correct.

The Chair: . . . from \$72,000, original estimate, down to \$51,000, or status quo, from the current budget.

Mr. Chapman: No. Travel is in the same amount.

The Chair: That's what I said.

Mr. Chapman: We did go down in other labour and services.

The Chair: I'm looking at operational expenses. On December 9 they were forecast at \$72,000, and now they're down to \$51,000.

Ms L. Johnson: Where's the \$51,000?

The Chair: I'm looking at \$51,000, visitor services. I have it as \$51,000 unless that got revised since my – in the December 9 binder we had overall visitor services travel, the first item under operational expenses, at \$72,000, but we also had the 2014-15 estimate at \$72,000. Now, in the new information that you've just received on Friday, both the 2014-15 estimate and the 2015-16 estimate are \$51,000.

11:20

Ms L. Johnson: Not in the document I have.

The Chair: I may have received an incorrect page.

Mr. Ellis: If I can clarify it, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Hang on. We have Jacquie rushing to the front here to clarify this. I've been given the wrong sheet here, which we'll sort out.

In any event, let us carry on here. Al, you were doing your estimates.

Mr. Chapman: Yeah. Other labour and services had gone up slightly from '14-15 to '15-16. Now it's come back down. We're eliminating services such as the hot chocolate service for Celebrate the Season next year as well as for Family Day. When people come into the Legislature in the evenings, we'll no longer be serving hot chocolate for free.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Chapman: I know. I feel like Scrooge, but I'm sorry.

The Chair: Just while we wait to get the right sheet for me – apologies. Allison Quast has given me hers.

Ms L. Johnson: Mr. Chair, I have a question.

The Chair: Let us go to a question off the telephones.

Ms L. Johnson: The revenue line, I gather, is sales from the gift shop. If that's the case, I'm interested in knowing what the average number of customers is and the size of their purchases.

Mr. Chapman: I can tell you that last year's number was over \$381,000, so when we were looking at moving to the new building, we knew it would be shutting down for a while, so we were a little conservative in bringing up our number but decided to bring it up a bit higher. I don't have the breakdown per customer. I know that right now we're looking at about: over 70 per cent are MLAs and that other 30 is public, and we're hoping to change that ratio as we move to a new storefront, but I don't have the breakdown per sale.

Ms L. Johnson: Okay. So 70 per cent of your revenue is from MLA purchases, and the rest is from the public, and you're hoping to change that balance in the new store location.

Mr. Chapman: Correct, and bring up the public . . .

Ms L. Johnson: How much bigger is the new store?

The Chair: Just let Mr. Chapman finish here, and then we'll come back.

Mr. Chapman: We're going from 700 square feet up to over 2,100 square feet. Also, it's actually visible by the public walking by on the street, where we're currently not.

The Chair: Okay. Back to the telephones.

Mrs. Fritz: I just had a question, Mr. Speaker, about the other labour and services, about the hot chocolate, that it's under that category and not hosting. I wondered if there are other food services with other labour and services.

Mr. Chapman: No, because it falls under our special events funding as opposed to hosting.

Mrs. Fritz: Perfect. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Anyone else with respect to overall visitors' services? Brian Mason, followed by Dr. Sherman.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious about the revenue numbers because, you know, a week ago you were projecting that the revenue would increase from \$294,000 to \$351,000. Now, a week later, you're predicting it's going to increase to \$376,000. So what changed in a week in terms of your projections for revenue?

Mr. Chapman: We re-explored it and decided to go up a little bit more, even though our target last year – we actually hit \$381,000, so we thought that we would increase that by a portion more.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, when you're projecting revenue from sales, it's not a really concrete estimate. I'm just curious if this adjustment in the revenue was made in order to make the numbers work rather than because you actually think you got it wrong the first time.

Mr. Chapman: I was told that I was underestimating based on last year's \$381,000, so I said: "We're closed for a while. Okay. I'll bring it back up a little bit higher based on last year's actual sales numbers." It wasn't a matter of trying to fix the numbers, no.

The Chair: You actually did some work on it to justify it.

Mr. Chapman: Yeah, and I looked at the increase in sales this year, where we're at year to date. We've actually had a good Christmas week, so that helped as well.

The Chair: Good to know. All right.

Dr. Sherman: Well, sort of along that line, I thought that when you're cutting staff and you're cutting hot chocolate for the children, it's mean. It's grinch time. What I hear, Mr. Speaker, is that there was an underestimation in last week's budget; an overestimation, possibly, in this week's budget.

The Chair: Al, is that how you see it?

Mr. Chapman: On the revenue side? Until we know how long the store is going to be closed with the move over there – and I don't have a crystal ball because of AI's changes – I can't estimate how long we're going to be closed down and what that number can be. So I'm giving my best estimate of where we're at, last year's sales and this year's sales to date.

The Chair: The bottom line is that you're looking at a projection of a \$44,000 increase from this year's budget to next year – right? – in spite of all the changes you've just mentioned.

Mr. Chapman: Correct.

The Chair: Dr. Sherman, you okay?

Dr. Sherman: I'm okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Anyone else on the overall visitor services budget?

Mr. Hodgson: I'd just make the comment that, as Mr. Chapman stated, the physical space that we're occupying in the new gift shop is 2.2 times the current, so the amount of merchandise we'll carry will increase correspondingly as will the pedestrian traffic that he alluded to. I'm sure it's an elementary principle of retailing that if you are where people are, you know, your business will likely do better, and this is what we're sort of banking on, and we've had a very good Christmas season so far, as Mr. Chapman alluded to.

The Chair: Very well said. Thank you.

Let us move on then to the next – sorry. George VanderBurg before we leave this.

Mr. VanderBurg: All those explanations are great. The only thing I just need to know is: am I using \$72,000 or \$51,000 for travel?

The Chair: The new sheet I've been provided shows \$72,000 in both.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. That's all I need to know. Thank you.

The Chair: I've cancelled out the other incorrect sheet I was given.

All right. Let's move on, then, to IT services. I hope I have the right sheet here. I'm going to look at three different sheets now to make sure that I do. The bottom line here is that there are some necessary increases. I have received some explanations, but I'm going to ask Jillian Tilley to give us an overview of what's going on in IT services, noting that the top half of the budget remains the same today as it was projected on December 9. The bottom half, however, shows a reduction from the original projection of December 9.

Jillian, let's look at some of the larger items such as – other labour and services is short-term contracts, consultants, streamlining, and so on, and it stays the same, so perhaps people will be satisfied with that. However, as I look at the data processing services and equipment, there's a drop from the current budget of \$1,902,000 down to \$1,860,000. I wonder if you could start by commenting there while people freshen up their notes.

Ms Tilley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have looked and reduced our operational for the data processing and services by \$42,000 and really have deferred some priorities and some internal projects that we feel we will sustain. We have to redirect some of our time and effort to focus on relocating to the EFB, so we will not actually get a chance to do some of the projects that we had anticipated.

The Chair: Okay. On this item only, data processing services, Mr. Anglin, is that your question, or do you have something else?

Mr. Anglin: No. Actually, I was going down one more, just to let you know.

The Chair: Well, conferences were explained last time as being our turn to host. Why don't you address that right now? Mr. Anglin is interested as well.

Ms Tilley: Certainly. Rob Reynolds had explained our parliamentary, I guess, associations when we talked about broadcasting. This is called CAPA, which stands for the Canadian Association of Parliamentary Administration. Alberta was instrumental in starting this 14 years ago. This is for us, again, to take our turn in hosting this conference. This is really a milestone in 2015, as this is its 14th year, that it's come full circle back to Alberta.

11:30

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. Is there anyone else with a question on information technology services?

Neither hearing nor seeing anyone, then let us move to the next item, which is legislative committees. We have expertise in the room here to address any questions. There's basically – what have we got here? – an increase of \$72,000. Is that right, Rob? That's how I read it.

Mr. Reynolds: Sure.

The Chair: Yeah. I see a grand total expenditure here of \$72,000. Is that right?

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

The Chair: Let me just get the other sheet out here. Yeah, we're going from a total expenditure of \$1,016,000 this year up to \$1,088,000. Does anybody have any questions regarding the standing committees of the Alberta Legislative Assembly?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, in last week's budget under Committees – General you estimated \$141,000. In today's budget it's actually gone up by \$56,000 to \$197,000. Why is this budget \$56,000 more than the last week's projected budget?

The Chair: Good question. Scott Ellis may have an answer.

Mr. Ellis: When we reviewed our House services budget and the committees budget, we recognized that there was an increase in the number of committee meetings that have occurred. It's a trend that we're seeing. Previously we had budgeted a new position in House services to deal with that committee work. We've changed that. We've said: no, we're not going to have a staff position there. What we will do is that under the committees section, which is where these costs should be, you know, shown, we will increase that under other labour and services for that \$56,000. That's basically what's happened here. There's been a decrease on the House services side and an increase on the committees side.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, last year the committee expense was \$94,000. The estimate that you presented last week was \$141,000. The estimate you present now is \$197,000. My question: are you planning to committee us, double the number of committees, and mire the opposition in more committees here in the Legislature? It seems to me that you've gone from \$94,000 to \$197,000, doubling the committee budget. Are there more committees coming here that we don't know about?

Mr. Ellis: There has been a general increase in the number of committees. If we were to go back and compare, going back to 2009-10, when the committees were originally established, there were 109 meetings held in that particular fiscal year. In 2010-11 it went to 66. In 2011-12 it remained at 66. In 2012-13 it went to 71. In 2013-14 it went to 95, and we're projecting that that number will be exceeded in this current year. So there has been some trending of increased committee meetings, and I believe that the

government has shown signs of increasing its activity or at least exceeding last year's.

Dr. Sherman: So let me get this straight. It's an economically difficult time, yet we're increasing government committees. That doesn't make sense.

The Chair: No. I don't think that's correct.
Rob.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, we do not in any way fund what you term "government committees." They are not paid for by the Legislative Assembly Office. The Legislative Assembly pays for committees of the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly Office does not determine how often those committees meet. That's up to the elected members. What I believe Mr. Ellis was saying was that based on the number of committee meetings in the past year, the projection is for a similar number of meetings or perhaps increased meetings in the next year, but it's a projection. I can assure you that we have no inside information about how often these committees are going to meet. All we're doing is reflecting what has occurred in the past year in terms of projecting what will happen.

But you did say: are there more committees planned? Yes, there is one. The Personal Information Protection Act review is budgeted for because that's required by statute to be done in the fiscal year in which it appears. So that is an additional committee. But with respect to the other committees we have no additional knowledge with respect to how often they would meet.

Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I've got to stick to this point. Last week I recognized that. Last week – I believe you have competent people here – you asked for an increase from \$94,000 to \$141,000. What has changed from last week to this week, where you've gone to \$197,000, asking for an increase of \$56,000 above last week's estimate? What do you know that we don't know, or what information didn't you have last week?

The Chair: I think part of that has to do with the hosting, Scott, does it not? Some of this was explained on December 9 as well, but can you just repeat it?

Mr. Ellis: Basically, there was a position budgeted for in House services in our December 9 budget estimate, and that has simply been moved out of that area and into this area. If you look at the net effect on the whole LAO branch operations, it's basically zero. It's just been put in a different location to better reflect what was happening in committees.

Dr. Sherman: So this extra \$56,000 from last week: is that for more food, or is it a paid staffer? What's that money for?

Mr. Ellis: A paid staffer although in this particular case what we're saying is that we're not going to have a staffperson in House services. We'll contract that service out under the committees area.

The Chair: So what you're really saying is that the person that you were going to pay for under House services you're not going to pay for under House services. You've moved that person, so to speak, over here, and that accounts for a large part of that.

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

The Chair: Could you also comment on the hosting side? I understood that hosting may have been included elsewhere in other committees individually, but now all the hosting costs – those would be refreshments and light lunches or whatever that occur over the supper hour, over the breakfast hour, over the lunch hour, and so on – might all be amalgamated here now under general. Is that my understanding?

Mr. Ellis: That's correct. I think the hosting expenses, which were typically budgeted in the past to each committee – and that would be shown on the first page there under committees – moved from those specific committee budgets into Committees – General.

The Chair: Okay. I think that's a good answer.

Is there anything else from anybody? You're satisfied with that, Raj?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Let us move on, then. Anyone else? Any questions on legislative committees?

Mrs. Fritz: I had a question about the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, the decrease in that. Is that as well because it will be meeting less? What was the reasoning with that? Were the hosting costs moved? What has changed with that committee?

Mr. Ellis: I believe that's the hosting costs, that I was referring to earlier.

The Chair: Could you start again? Your microphone wasn't on. We got your question, Yvonne. We didn't get Mr. Ellis's answer.

Mr. Ellis: I think she must have heard anyway, but it's basically due to the change in the hosting, that I just referred to a brief moment ago, in moving the hosting costs from that committee down into general.

Mrs. Fritz: So that would be totally about hosting, that \$40,000 or so. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Anyone else? Any questions on legislative committees?

Hearing none, let us move on to the next item, which is MLA administration, the ninth item, so to speak. I already covered some of this earlier, but if you look at your new sheet, you will note that there is an overall reduction in the part that I mentioned in my comments at the top of the day, an adjustment, as it's called, about three-quarters of the way down the page, of \$624,000.

We also have some reductions to the communication element, which we talked about last week, and that's got to do with the fact that fewer and fewer of us, MLAs and their constituency offices, are using post mail. More seem to be using e-mail, electronic mail, now. That's one significant change there.

Are there any questions with respect to the MLA administration page? If not, we can come back to it if necessary.

11:40

Dr. Sherman: Can we come back to that one?

The Chair: We can come back to it, yeah.

Dr. Sherman: I just need a little bit more time to go over it, please.

The Chair: Yeah.

While we're pausing on this, everyone has the new sheet, the horizontal sheet, the spreadsheet, as it were? It's only eight and a half by 11, but it's a horizontal document. It's a single page. That's online, right?

Ms Quast: It is, yes.

The Chair: And has it been circulated to all the members here as well? Everyone has it? Okay.

Brian Mason has a question here.

Mr. Mason: With respect to that sheet specifically, Mr. Speaker, is that in order?

The Chair: Please.

Mr. Mason: I'm just curious. As I look at it and if you look under the constituency office category – there are three lines there – and you move over to the dollar increase from the 2014-15 budget, what is the increase from the 2014-15 budget? I don't get that.

The Chair: It's the second one. It's the staffing. It's that 2.25 per cent market adjustment for all staff who are part of the public service and the up to 3 per cent maximum, that I referenced at the beginning of the discussion.

Mr. Mason: You know, I understand that, but in this particular column, the dollar increase from the 2014-15 budget, what are we increasing over a budget we haven't passed yet? I'm not following what that even means.

The Chair: It's just to try and show you the difference from the budget year we're living now to the one that we're considering the estimate for, 2015-16.

Isn't that right, Scott?

Mr. Mason: It says: an increase from the 2014-15 budget.

Mr. Ellis: No. Sorry. The \$82,315 was the number that was approved by the Members' Services Committee in 2014-15. If you look under staffing – is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Mason: Okay. I want to make sure I'm on the same page.

The Chair: He's looking at the horizontal sheet?

Mr. Mason: The horizontal sheet. Members' Services Allowance (Budget 2015-2016) – Proposed Changes: is that it? Okay. From the shaded grey area, the second-last column, the dollar increase from the 2014-15 budget, then I go down. I see an overall dollar increase of \$523,000, right?

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

Mr. Mason: Okay. So we're on the same page. Now, that's an increase from what budget to what budget?

Mr. Ellis: From '14-15 to 2014.

Mr. Mason: Okay. So that's looking backwards? That's the increase in this budget that you're proposing?

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Good. I just want to make sure. I've got it now. You have a \$523,000 increase for constituency offices, right?

Mr. Ellis: Right.

Mr. Mason: Then a reduction of \$39,000 for communications – that's the only reduction I see in this column – then a \$13,000 increase in promotional, and no changes to the matrix. Then at the bottom it says that there is a \$127,000 reduction, but there's a \$523,000 increase and only a \$39,000 reduction. How do you get to \$127,000 less?

Mr. Ellis: Do you have the latest version of the chart, which shows December 22 on the top?

Mr. Mason: No.

Mr. Ellis: If you don't, I have one here.

The Chair: That's what I was asking about: has everyone got the new sheet that was circulated?

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Let's just let Brian review the new sheet now that he has the right sheet, and let me ask if there is anyone else with any questions about MLA administration.

Let's go to Dr. Sherman while we let Mr. Mason catch up on that new sheet.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm just comparing the numbers you gave us last week and the numbers you gave us this week. Human resources is the same, operational expenses are \$200,000 down, but for member services allowances your budget was \$14,645,000. It's \$13,316,000. That's a \$1,329,000 adjustment. That's a huge adjustment.

The Chair: That's a reduction.

Dr. Sherman: Why such a significant difference? If you look at the budget that you presented last week, under member services allowances it's \$14,645,000, and the budget this week is \$13,316,000.

The Chair: Raj, what was requested by some members – I don't remember if it was at the table on December 9 or if it was in meetings that we had after that with some of the members who came in to see us or that I went out to see – is that they wanted us to do a redo, if you will, of this aspect based more on actual expenditures by MLAs in their constituency offices. What we found after a lot of number crunching is that on average when it comes to this category, MLAs tend to spend approximately 92 per cent of the total budget allocated, so we were asked to review the actual expenditures compared with the projected ones.

I think I'm on the right track here, Scott, am I not? He's nodding his head that I am. That's where there's an adjustment based on actuals. You could read that sentence as an adjustment based on actual monies expended by MLAs on a per MLA basis, using the average of 92 per cent being expended. I mean 92 per cent of the allocated funds or the approved funds.

Scott, do you want to embellish on that a bit?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Basically what we're saying is that if members' expenditure patterns under the category of MSA continue on as they have, we won't need the full amount of that budget, so we've reduced it to reflect those spending patterns. That is the reason for the reduction in that particular area.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I think you're going to unfairly disadvantage all the opposition caucuses here. The government

MLAs may have a lot of money for brochures and stuff. One thing I'll tell you – and I'd like Mr. Mason to weigh in on this – is that the opposition MLAs don't put out three or four mailers for communications. The majority of our budget goes towards staff to deal with the complex issues that we have to deal with. A lot of our communications budget actually goes to hiring staff to deal with the social work required. You've talked to 87 MLAs, and the majority are government MLAs. They do not face the same challenges in their offices as we opposition MLAs because we have to deal with the majority of the complaints from Albertans against the government.

I'm very concerned as to the budget hit to the opposition caucuses because we don't use that much for communication. We use that for staffing. I'd like Mr. Mason's input on this as well.

The Chair: Yeah. We'll get it in just a moment. Just so you know, we only asked the LAO administration to do what they were told to do. They've done that, and it's up to the committee to decide whether they want to proceed with it or not. Please don't read anything more into it than that. Your comments are valid. I welcome Mr. Mason's now.

Mr. Mason: I just had a question about what this actually was. It's not reflected in the budgets that are being proposed. It just gives an idea what it would look like if we set all the budgets of constituency offices based on what the average expenditure is. But it's not yet reflected in any budgets. Although I don't know what the government caucus has in mind for motions a bit later on, I would just say that, you know, you can't really base the budgets on the average activity level in the offices. I think Dr. Sherman is correct. Some of our offices are very active and do measure the dollars we get very carefully and shouldn't be clawed back to the level of average activity. In the end if the money is not expended from a constituency office, it goes back into general revenues and is not expended, so there's no reason to make us all average. Some of us, Mr. Speaker, would like to be above average.

11:50

The Chair: And I raised that point on your behalf, by the way.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Nonetheless, there was a balanced discussion on it. Scott to comment quickly, and then we'll go to Dr. Sherman.

Mr. Ellis: I should mention that the formulas that we have in place are still applied to all the constituency offices as you see on this sheet, okay? So it's not decreasing the amount of money made available to members. However, what we're saying is that we anticipate that given those funding formulas and given the amounts that are going to the constituency budgets for the member to use, they will not spend all the money as they've shown in the past; therefore, we won't be expending that money if everyone continues on the way they are. It's the same for everyone. The formulas have been the same no matter which constituency you talk about.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm just concerned about your methodology. You know, with the collapse of the Wildrose caucus I predict that the workload in the existing opposition caucuses will go up: the social work, the phone calls, the e-mails, the complaints. I just ask the Legislative Assembly to pay heed to that. With such a massive majority I see our offices doing a lot more work. The distribution of work with the collapse of the Wildrose for opposition will fall to the Liberals and New Democrats and

maybe the handful of Wildrose MLAs and the one independent member here.

Mr. VanderBurg: You know, I don't want to get this into a political discussion. The fact is that the matrix stays the same. The budget stays the same for each member. All this does is reflect the actuals of the averages that we've had in the past. If you look year after year after year, there is money returned to general revenue, so why not estimate in this budget a closer cost that actually happens. This is all that's being done, you know. I don't know. You can talk all you want about political work or not. The matrix is not changing. Each MLA is still getting the same amount of funding. It's just reflecting the actual cost.

Mr. Mason: Well, that statement gives me cause for concern. This average number is not reflected in the budgets now. Is it your intention that it will be when we're finished here today? Are you going to bring us all down to the average expenditure, even those that . . .

Mr. VanderBurg: I had no idea I was going to say that, but it's not a bad idea.

Mr. Mason: George, come on. You just did say that.

Mr. VanderBurg: You're just putting words into my mouth.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I apologize, then. I'll wait for your motions. But I am concerned that those of us that do need the money shouldn't be reduced because other offices are less active.

Mr. VanderBurg: I've never heard anybody here say that the matrix should be changed, but if you're considering that, I'll consider it.

Mr. Mason: No, no. Sorry. I'm just, you know . . .

The Chair: Okay. Let me go to Dr. Sherman here quickly.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, that's okay.

The Chair: Let's go to the main conversation.

Dr. Sherman: I just want to echo Brian Mason. There's nothing average about the Alberta Liberal MLAs – we do above average work – in addition to the New Democrats.

Mr. Mason: Everybody does good work.

Dr. Sherman: There's a lot of work to be done in the CA offices. Really, this isn't for MLA salaries. It's not to our benefit. It's really for staff in our offices to be able to do the work, that is immense.

The Chair: Okay. Is there anyone else on this page, anyone else that wants to talk about the MLA administration budget?

Neither hearing nor seeing anyone, then let's move on to the next item, which is government members' services. One thing that I want to point out before we go through government members' services – and we're talking about private members here, remember, and then we'll talk about the Official Opposition services, and then we'll talk about the Liberals and the NDP and the one independent we have – is to note for your pleasure that the description has been changed to reflect more accurately what it is. Instead of it being called private members' allowance, I've asked this section to be retitled Caucus Staff and Operational Costs, which is what you have in your new budget estimates, because

that is 100 per cent what it actually is. We use the broad term private members' allowance in the general sense because that's what gives rise to this category, but the description that fits more accurately in my view – and I hope you will agree – is to label it Caucus Staff and Operational Costs. That would reduce many of the questions that I've been asked over the last two weeks.

With that in mind, the government members' services, for their staff and operational costs, are targeted on this sheet the way you see it. It reflects the fact that we have now seen significant changes in caucus makeup. That's that little rectangle that you see at the bottom of your budget estimates page, the one that starts out by saying, "Private PC member MLA's." Everybody has that?

Are there any questions on the first sheet of five that we'll be reviewing in this respect?

Ms L. Johnson: Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Ms L. Johnson: Could you clarify for me the merit percentage? It was on that grid we just looked at in our previous conversation. It's in here as well, that change due to market and merit application. Merit is separate from the AUPE agreement?

The Chair: No. It's also included in the public-sector compensation agreement decided by the government. I talked about it at the very beginning, Linda, where we talked about 2.25 per cent and up to 3 per cent maximum for those who are eligible and are under the Public Service Act.

Ms L. Johnson: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions?

If not, let us move on to the next tab, Official Opposition services. We see a sizable reduction here, as you can see, precipitated over the last two weeks largely by the change of nine members from the Official Opposition.

Any questions?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, have you made a decision as to who the Official Opposition in the Legislature would be?

The Chair: I have indicated publicly that I will be making a decision, I hope, by not later than tomorrow regarding the Official Opposition status, but I'm glad you mention the question because this estimate is made without prejudice to any decisions that might be forthcoming in that respect.

Dr. Sherman: In approving our budget, I notice that your second page says, "Liberal Opposition." For me it's difficult. By having the Liberal opposition budget being voted on, we're actually prejudicing that we're not going to be the opposition.

The Chair: No. That's not the way we see it. At the moment the status quo prevails until I make a new decision or re-entrench the existing one, hopefully tomorrow. These are just the titles that we are using in the budget. For ease of flow and because of the consistency that I just mentioned, the incumbency rule prevails for purposes of our discussion of the budget.

Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, with respect to the Official Opposition budget I'm curious as to what happens when we have the kinds of events within the Legislative Assembly that we saw last week. The existing formula is reapplied automatically by the LAO: is that what happens? Of course, these budgets are

annual, so when changes are made in terms of the composition of the caucuses, then the same formula is just automatically reapplied, effective almost immediately. Is that correct?

The Chair: Pretty much so. That's exactly how this was done.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Okay. Now, we know that a number of staff that previously worked for the Official Opposition have lost their jobs. I guess my question is: who made that decision? Was that the existing, the remaining Wildrose caucus? Was it the LAO? Who made that decision?

12:00

The Chair: I don't have anything to do with the staffing of the caucuses, so I assume that the caucuses themselves must have made those decisions. Unfortunately, we don't have anyone that I'm aware of here from the Wildrose caucus to try and answer their side of it.

Mr. Mason: But that decision about who's staying, who's going would have been made by the remaining Wildrose caucus, would it not?

The Chair: I think they have a chief of staff, that was probably involved in that, Brian. I really don't know.

Mr. Mason: Okay. All right. So it wasn't made by the government.

The Chair: I don't know. You'd have to ask the government. Not to my knowledge, but I don't know.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Good.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, in this you're assuming that the Wildrose because of incumbency is the Official Opposition.

The Chair: No. Let me rephrase that. You've got the wrong spin on this, Raj. What we have at the moment is an Official Opposition that is the status quo. That happens to be the Wildrose. I can't change that. That's what it is, and that's what this was based on. The next party, as has been the case, which is also the status quo, is the Liberals. The next one, which is also the status quo, is the NDP. None of that has changed. Now, tomorrow it could be different. It could be the same – I don't know – but we had to develop a budget based on something, so we worked with the status quo.

Dr. Sherman: A question.

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Sherman: According to your line of logic the status quo right now, today, at this moment in time, while we vote – the Wildrose has no elected leader. They have no internally appointed leader. So based on today, is there usually a leader's allowance given if there's no leader who's in the House?

The Chair: Well, I understand that the Wildrose will be appointing an interim leader at 1 o'clock. But again, I think you're missing the point. I realize the political hay you're trying to make here, but I would ask you to just back off a little bit if you don't mind. All I'm trying to tell you is that the status quo prevails in a circumstance like this, and for purposes of our budget that's what we used. It's just for purposes of crunching the numbers. If the names change tomorrow, then so be it, but for the moment, Raj, just to develop a budget and get it before the committee, we had to

put something in there. So that's what we went with, the status quo.

Dr. Sherman: So what I hear you saying is that this committee will approve a budget based on what may happen in the next couple of hours or 24 or 36 hours.

The Chair: Not at all, Raj, so don't try that one on me, okay? It was a good effort.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I would never try anything on you.

The Chair: I know, I know, but it won't pass with me, and you know it won't, but it was a good try. [Ms Johnson left the audio conference] Oh, no. We've lost one member. Is she coming back on? Oh, it's noon. I'm sorry. We're going a little slower than I had thought.

Nonetheless, given that bit of interesting interchange with Dr. Sherman, is there any follow-up?

Mr. Anglin: I just want to make a note to the committee that I didn't get the chance to make my political hay along with it, but I'll take your advice on that.

The Chair: Right. Thanks for working with me on that.

Okay. Anything else on the Official Opposition services page?

If not, let us move to the next page, the Liberal opposition services, for purposes of budget discussion without prejudice and all of that other stuff I mentioned. Is there any comment or question with respect to this page?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might consider changing the titles of those pages to Official Opposition and second opposition, just to clarify.

The Chair: Well, if the need arises to do that, we'll do that, but for purposes of the status quo, which I've explained – and I'll explain again if you want me to – we'll just leave it the way it sits. Agreed?

Dr. Sherman: Agreed.

Mr. Mason: And I want to be third opposition.

The Chair: Agreed.

So I have agreement from Dr. Sherman. I want to turn the page quickly to see if we can finish this off before too long. I had anticipated that we'd be done by noon, but are we okay to go a little bit longer? We'll forgo the comfort break. Do I have general agreement from everyone? Is anybody opposed? Okay. We're unanimous on that. Let's move forward, and we'll try and wrap this up shortly.

The NDP opposition page. Are there any questions or comments in that regard?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the reduction from the proposal last week in this case is from \$819,000 to \$815,000. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yeah. Last week it was a total caucus budget of \$818,763, and the one I see today is \$814,000, so it's an adjustment of – what is that? – \$4,000.

Mr. Mason: It's \$815,000 down at the very bottom line.

The Chair: Sorry; \$815,000. Yeah.

Mr. Mason: Good. I just wanted to clarify. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Any other questions on this page?

If not, let us move, then, to the independent members pages. Again, just for purposes of continuity and because it exists in the 2014-15 budget, we had Mr. Allen in there, and we have since shown him as not being in there for '15-16, I mean. For 2015-16 there's nothing on that page, but there is something on MLA Joe Anglin and his independent status. Are there any questions with regard to this page? None. Okay. Thank you.

Let us go to the final column, then. That will be the special funding requirements, which are all to do with the move into the new premises at the renovated federal building. I covered some of this earlier, but if anyone is interested in asking any questions, we have people here with the expertise to comment on it. Again, to repeat what I said earlier, we see some significant decreases here because we will forgo the masking between the floors, which I talked to all four caucuses and the independent member about. The rooms and all of that are already soundproofed to the extent that they can be. The sound masking is that white noise, that is not going to be implemented at this time. There's a considerable saving there. Similarly, we're good to go ahead with all four committee rooms, but they won't all be decked out with the ability to do television services. I don't know if there is more to it than that. We won't be implementing that, in other words, so there will be a considerable cost saving here.

Are there any questions or comments regarding this final tab?

Mr. Anglin: I understand the savings for the TV monitoring in the committee rooms, but with the adjustments for cost savings did we penalize ourselves, where it would cost more to implement it later? Communication to the public is something that is paramount to me and, I think, many other members, but this could be something that we could implement years down the road. I just want to know if that was taken into consideration when we cut the costs here.

The Chair: Well, yes and no, to the extent that you can sort of guess what something delayed might cost you later on, but suffice it to say that the public's access to information or their ability to follow coverage such as this meeting and others will not be compromised. They can still get it during the discussion, which we're having right now, for example – there are ways that they can participate and listen in – and then *Hansard*, of course, is available after, so every word said is recorded and reflected. We get numerous requests for *Hansard* copies after some of these meetings.

Are there any other questions or comments regarding this final tab?

Okay. Scott, let me come back to you. Did you manage to get any details for Dr. Sherman's question earlier?

Mr. Ellis: I haven't. We missed the comfort break, but I can certainly do that and provide that information with just a quick counsel.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I'd rather that you have a little more time than being pushed into a five-minute explanation of that.

I have some other needs that I need to take back to my caucus, and that's a second look at conferences and travel and, you know, a better explanation if there's more work that you see that we can do on that. In general, I'm very satisfied with the work that you, Mr. Speaker, and the staff have done to take the estimates from 7.23 to 6.85. But given the time pressure that Scott Ellis is under

and the further information that I'd like to have on conferences and travel, if there's another opportunity to reduce that even more, I'd like that.

12:10

So I'm prepared to make a motion to defer items (a) to (d). You said that you hadn't met with the members on (b), (c), and (d) because of time constraints. I'd be prepared to make a motion to

defer a decision on items (a) to (d) to a further meeting.

But I'd want some advice from you on that, Mr. Speaker, if this puts you in a jam or not.

The Chair: Well, it doesn't put me in a jam because we know – and I think I've mentioned it before – that the middle of January is really our drop-dead date, so to speak, to forward something in. But you've just flagged something else here, and I am sensitive to the fact that three committee members were not able to participate in today's discussion due to a variety of circumstances and that, traditionally, people do want to take another moment and go back to their own caucuses. This information just came out on Friday. Some of it was updated today.

I have no problem deferring that provided that we can have a meeting right after, Scott, with you and your staff and get started on some of this other stuff.

With respect to the travel to conferences, George, I would just mention that there are – I don't remember the exact number – 10 or 12 conferences mentioned in that booklet, that I flashed last December 9, called Building our Legacy. There are about 10 or 12 conferences in here that we attend, and we attend them for two reasons. One is to allow MLAs to participate in some professional development. Some of us have been to those conferences as private members, and we know the value of them. Others are parliamentary conferences for the Commonwealth, for example, which I had no choice but to attend because I was only one of three voting representatives, speakers, as it were, from the Canadian jurisdiction. So there's that reason.

The second thing is so that we can maintain a foothold with them, which I think you yourself might have mentioned in different words earlier. We don't want to lose our space and our place because what's happening here in terms of our overall budget constraints, which we've laboured on this morning, is happening in other jurisdictions who are hosting, and sometimes they are paring down the numbers. And they, generally speaking, do the same thing that I just did last year and the year before. When I'm hosting a conference, I invite everybody, but I go to those who were at the previous one sort of as your first go-to group, if you will. We don't want to pare ourselves out of the invitation list, so to speak, because we receive very positive feedback, and it comes unanimously from all four caucuses and/or independent members.

With that in mind, does anyone else wish to speak to this motion that Mr. VanderBurg has moved before I call the question on it?

Mr. Mason: The motion is to defer agenda items under old business, (a) to (d), to a meeting to be organized by the chair. Is that right?

The Chair: Agreed, knowing, Brian, that first priority will be given to our budget estimates, for sure, because we've got to put that to rest.

Mr. Mason: Oh, yeah. So that'll be in the new year?

The Chair: It'll be sometime in the new year because, of course, we've lost a few staff to holidays already, and this was an unanticipated meeting, clearly. So we'll have to have it somewhere – I expect it'll be just the week before the 15th of January. That would be my target, after more people are settled in. We'll do our best to get the information out again at least two or three days in advance, showing whatever other upgrades or changes or reductions or whatever might be necessary.

Anybody on the telephones with a question?

Mrs. Fritz: No. Just that I support that motion, Mr. Speaker, that's been put forward because of a few of the questions that have come up but also as it came up earlier about this change occurring at 1 o'clock, and it might help you as well with the labelling of different budgets and the item to make it more current.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any other question, comment, or discussion on the motion?

If not, are you ready for the question? Those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. VanderBurg should now say aye. Those opposed should say no. Okay. That is a unanimous decision. It is so ordered and so carried.

Our final item of business is simply to talk about the date of the next meeting, which I'm going to guess will be somewhere between January 7 and 15, somewhere in that week. I'll survey you accordingly.

Okay. That's it. A motion to adjourn? Mr. Hale. Thank you. Those in favour? Is anybody in favour of the motion to adjourn? Okay. Is anyone opposed? That motion is carried. Thank you.

On behalf of all members of this MSC I extend a special thank you to all the LAO staff who worked so hard with me over the past two weeks to prepare the revised budget estimates that we reviewed today. Thank you, all. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

[The committee adjourned at 12:16 p.m.]

