



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Wednesday, February 24, 2016
1 p.m.

Transcript No. 29-1-2

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Chair
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND), Deputy Chair

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)*
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)**
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)
McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)***

* substitution for Marlin Schmidt

** substitution for Stephanie McLean

*** substitution for Derek Fildebrandt

Also in Attendance

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND)

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Allison Quast	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Bev Alenius	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services
Brian G. Hodgson	Sergeant-at-Arms
Al Chapman	Manager, Visitor Services
Cheryl Scarlett	Director of Human Resources, Information Technology and Broadcast Services
Scott Ellis	Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Jacqueline Breault	Manager, Corporate Services, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Darren Joy	Manager, Financial Services, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

1 p.m.

Wednesday, February 24, 2016

[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the February 24 meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services to commence.

As I understand it, we have some substitutions again. Member Cortes-Vargas is substituting for the hon. Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Malkinson is substituting for the hon. Ms McLean, and Mr. van Dijken is substituting for Mr. Fildebrandt. Is that correct?

Mr. Cooper, you may need to leave at 3 o'clock. Is that right?

Mr. Cooper: That is correct, sir.

The Chair: I would ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, including those who are participating by telephone.

Members will note – and I apologize. It was my decision that you did not receive this information sooner. I was the roadblock in the process. I think at some point in this agenda we will talk about, on a go-forward basis, kind of a standard that we aim for in terms of when material will be added to an agenda. The materials have been posted to the committee's internal website. Budget binders were delivered to you, I understand, but if we do have a need for extra copies of these documents, please let our committee clerk, Ms Quast, know.

Go ahead, Allison.

Ms Quast: Allison Quast, committee clerk.

Cortes-Vargas: Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Nielsen: Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Piquette: Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mrs. Schreiner: Kim Schreiner, MLA for Red Deer-North.

Mr. Malkinson: Brian Malkinson, Calgary-Currie, subbing for Stephanie McLean.

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver, MLA, Calgary-Hays.

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

Mr. S. Ellis: Scott Ellis, director and senior financial officer for the financial management and administrative services branch.

Mr. Joy: Darren Joy, manager of financial services with financial management and administrative services.

Mr. Clark: Good afternoon. Greg Clark, MLA, Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, MLA, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Cooper: Good afternoon. I'm the MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

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

Mrs. Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, Acting Clerk of administration and director of human resources, information technology, and broadcast services.

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Acting Clerk, procedure, and Senior Parliamentary Counsel and director of House services.

The Chair: I'm Robert Wanner. I'm the MLA for Medicine Hat and chair of the committee.

Who has joined us via phone?

Ms Luff: Robyn Luff, MLA for Calgary-East.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Ms Jabbour: Debbie Jabbour, MLA, Peace River.

The Chair: Welcome, Debbie.

Anyone else?

To the agenda. If you will, you will notice that item 6 on the agenda refers to the matter that Mr. Clark brought to our attention at our last meeting. You would have received an e-mail from me yesterday, I believe. I also had a conversation with Mr. Clark yesterday, just advising him that we did not have the detailed discussions complete in a manner that, I think, met the expectation of the committee with respect to the report on temporary residence allowance. Staff did prepare a draft document. I did not have enough time to review it. It's an important enough matter, though, that I think it requires, certainly, my due diligence as well as yourselves. So with your permission I'd like to amend the agenda to table item 6 to a future date. I believe that we still, Ms Quast, have looked at a date of March 1, which is next week.

Ms Quast: That's correct.

The Chair: Again, after this meeting we may or may not have other issues that we need to address at the meeting, but this could be one that we would include on March 10 so that it's not a matter of it not being dealt with. If there's an agreement – Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: I apologize, Speaker. I thought I heard you say March 1, and then I thought I heard you say March 10, so I'm just looking to be clear on what . . .

The Chair: It's the very first time I've ever got confused about dates. It's March 1 that we were considering, correct?

Ms Quast: Correct.

The Chair: Thank you. Make a motion. Is there a name? If someone would move the adoption of the amended agenda. Mr. Cooper. Thank you. All in favour, say aye. Opposed, say no. The motion has been carried, that the February 24 agenda of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be adopted as amended.

On the phone, Ms Luff, agreed?

Ms Luff: Aye.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

Ms Jabbour is on the phone, but she does not have a vote at the committee.

The minutes of the last meeting were circulated. Would a member make a motion to approve the minutes of the February 9 meeting of this committee? Member Cortes-Vargas. All in favour, say aye. On the telephone, Robyn? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

I think the major objective for today is that we aim, if we can, to deal with the proposed budget estimates for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta offices. It is my hope that we might be able to in fact finish this review and seek approval today. In the event that that's not possible, then we maybe need to deal with this in the March 1 meeting. However, our staff have reminded me in fairly clear and concise terms that the Treasury Board has asked for this by the end of this month, which is prior to March 1, so I think we have some need for us to – and I believe, I hope that that agreement can be reached today. But we have an expectation that we need to meet the report for the – is that correct, Scott?

Mr. S. Ellis: Yeah.

The Chair: Two weeks ago we approved the parameters for this particular budget: no general inflationary factor; no market, in-range, or merit increases for the LAO nonmanagement staff; no market, in-range, or merit increases for LAO management; and compensation rates would be frozen at March 31, 2016, levels for the fiscal year 2016-17 and 2017-18.

It's proposed that all staff benefits would be budgeted based on the actual premiums or the anticipated changes in premiums that we are aware of.

The branch budgets. As we go through the budgets, this matter will serve as an indicator of what drives the costs in the budget. We've projected for 70 sessional days based on the sessional calendar that was provided to us, based on 81, I believe, committee meetings also with an average of 3 hours per meeting, for an estimate of about 240 in total.

1:10

In the MLA administration budgets there will be no annual adjustments for the period of April 1, 2013, to 2017. Did we make a motion on that last time? Yes, we did. Yes. I think it was amended here at committee. I think that – correct me. The motion last meeting was – Scott?

Mr. S. Ellis: It's to 2018 now.

The Chair: Eighteen? I thought it was '19. Is it '18 or '19? So the motion that we passed last week was "until two months after the first day of the 30th Legislature." Is that right? Are we clear on what's intended, the intent of this motion? Is it to '19 or '18?

Go ahead, Shannon.

Ms Dean: Mr. Speaker, it would be 2019.

The Chair: Twenty-nineteen. So we understand? We agree? The intent is 2019. That all benefit plans, either budgeted or actual cost, with no anticipated increases for '16 or '17.

Constituency office staff benefits would be based on actual or anticipated premiums for various benefits that we have in place. There are no increases in the budgeted amounts for 2016-17. In the constituency offices there are no proposed increases for this portion of the budget.

In the communication element of those members' services allowances there it's proposed that the current postage amounts of \$1.80 for return letter postage and the most recent list of electors be used to calculate the funding element for 2016-17.

On promotional elements there is no general inflation added. It was frozen at last year's basis.

In the matrix element, which I think everyone is familiar with, it's proposed that the amount of funding provided to each range remain at existing levels and that there'd be no increase for this budget.

In the caucus budgets there will be no market or in-range merit increases to caucus staff remuneration and no general inflation factor added, and I'll speak more to this one when we arrive to the planning and development initiatives. There are no proposed increases. In fact, you will see some significant reduction in this area. You may have seen this in earlier budgets identified as the – I think the wording was "special funding." On a go-forward basis it would be my hope and intent that we would be reframing this as a future planning and development initiative that this committee may be a part of deciding.

Before we move to it – as I've said earlier, clearly, I would have hoped that we would have had this budget information posted sooner, but the staff, with considerable effort and numerous meetings and hours, have prepared this budget in order that it could be available today, and I'd just like to express my appreciation to them.

I just want to signal – and I've mentioned this to staff – that when we go forward, personally, it's my hope that we could be able to look at a reframe of the way in which the budget for this particular area is framed, but I don't want to indicate that that's actually going to happen. Clearly, that's an issue that I would need to discuss with staff on a go-forward basis. It's not a substantive change; it's more of a process question.

I hope that we as a committee and we as a 29th Legislature can agree on some broad, general indicators or performance measures that we can apply, that we bring to bear on the various sections that we deal with.

I would also respectfully request – and take it based upon my personal experience with learning about this budget. You do have before you the budget summary. I would respectfully like to suggest that we go to the details first, starting with the tab that in your binders, I think, is identified as tab 1, financial management and administrative services. And then at the end – and Allison will correct me if I forget – we will go back to the summary because it's been my experience as we've moved through these that many of the summary questions are driven by the details. You'll already have been through that, and it'll make more sense. If that's agreed, I would take you to tab 1. Scott will speak to the details.

By the way, I would also add another topic, one that I might speak to again under the planning and development initiatives. I've had several discussions with staff about the possibility – I emphasize possibility – that over the next 12 months we might have what are information-education sessions over a lunch hour. MLAs would be invited to come to a session. Maybe we'd have external people, but we'd start with some of the LAO staff, and they would be able to speak to you about, you know, the key functions that those people play and would be, I think, informative. So when we arrive back here, we're completely knowledgeable about the roles and the amount of resources and time that these various tasks of our staff take. That's just a go-forward idea at this stage, but it is something that I think needs some warrant.

This provides accounting services to all the members, to your constituency offices, caucuses, and to the LAO itself. It prepares the budgets. It processes claims, expenses, and monthly reports for members. It provides the furniture, equipment, and supplies procurement and constituency office servicing, the leasing aspects of our office. It provides advice and assistance in the co-ordination of both short-term rental and independent contractor agreements. It deals with the risk management and insurance services and oversees and provides advice on support of records management and administers an issue that I know all of us are aware of, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as it applies to the Assembly. There have been reductions in this budget in an effort to

achieve the no-growth, no-increase parameter that we approved at the last meeting.

Scott, at a very, very high level I think I've mentioned the key factors here, but please go ahead.

Mr. S. Ellis: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you alluded to, we do provide all the services that you outlined, and as such our budget reflects about 97 per cent of human resource expenses. There's very little operational cost in terms of supplies or other labour and services or those kinds of operational costs; 97 per cent of our expenses are in the human resources area.

Specific to human resources we have an overall decrease in expenditures in that area projected for '16-17 of about 1.4 per cent. This is primarily reflective of the fact that we have lower staff remuneration and benefits, as outlined in the budget parameters. Our operational expenses have increased slightly to account for some third-party storage of our records. That is a fairly minimal cost increase there. But overall, considering our human resources decreases and a slight increase in operational expenses, we're showing an overall decrease of \$23,000 relative to last year's estimate, and that's a percentage decrease of 1.4 per cent.

1:20

The Chair: Questions?

Hearing none, I would move to the page called tab 2, human resources. Again, a decrease in this area. As we all know, this business that we're in has everything to do with the people who support and serve us both in our constituency offices as well as at the LAO, probably the single most important aspect of the stuff that we do. The services that this area provides are to the MLAs, the caucus, constituency employees as well as the management staff. It maintains an independent payroll and human resource information service system, which meets our needs on a daily basis. Systems and programs allow human resources to provide nonpartisan and responsive advice and deliveries to us: payroll and benefit, compensation and classification, employee relations, disability management, health and safety, recruitment and employment contract administration, learning and development and performance measurements, some management coaching, organizational planning, and, of course, the election, by-election, and cabinet shuffle transition processes. This area is showing a decline of nearly 1 per cent.

Cheryl Scarlett, can you add and elaborate on some of the very high-level details that I made?

Mrs. Scarlett: Similar to Mr. Ellis's presentation in terms of the decrease that you're looking at, that being a proposed decrease in expenditures of \$19,000, this is reflective of the actual costs of the health benefits presently in addition to a small proposed savings that we are looking for in the interest of being fiscally responsible, trying to come up with some additional savings. So there is a \$7,000 reduction in operations.

The Chair: Questions?

Hearing none, Legislature Library. Val Footz is with us today. My comments may reflect a little bias, but I think that Val and the library are one of the best kept secrets in this place. Please express, I know on behalf of all of the people at the table, our support and appreciation to your staff as well.

It's the parliamentary library for us. It provides, again, nonpartisan, confidential, and up-to-date information and reference services for members and their staff, both what for some of us at the table, with the colour of our hair, is called now a traditional method of providing information and a modern and much younger technological information. I still lean to more traditional. Customized

daily news services are delivered to us, collecting and providing access to information in a variety of formats, history and parliamentary heritage. If you want to know more about where we want to go, it's important that we know where we have been, and that's the place that we will find that out. Again, about a 1 per cent decrease in expenditures.

Are there any questions to Ms Footz?

I will signal to the committee – and I might touch on this – clearly, we don't have enough information and detail relative to other demanding priorities. During the budget review that I had with staff – I do think that we need to be looking at some digitization of our historical records, that I think we need to be considering. Now, it's important. How urgent it is is one of the prioritization processes, but there are some records there that, if they were to be lost, would have some long-term impact on us. That's just sort of – again, it's this idea at the first point.

Hearing no questions, I will move on to tab 4, which is probably the area that most of you will be focused on, and it represents – Acting Clerk Shannon Dean will speak to the details of this, but the costs in here come from a number of various services that support the Assembly. This is the area that is the driver. When we're in that Assembly or in these committee meetings, it is we who are determining – there's sort of a fixed cost to keep the basics in place, and then volume is incrementally increasing. Based on past records, these numbers are driven by about an additional eight sitting hours per week. We're on average at about 35 hours per week based upon some history. That in turn reflects some staffing costs related to security and ceremonial services as well as *Hansard* staffing costs and also some costs related to the communications branch.

I'm going to stop at that point and let Shannon speak in greater detail. I know that this is the area that I would hope we can look at our format on a go-forward basis.

Shannon, go ahead. Are there any other points that I've missed that need to be addressed and you'd like to see referenced?

Ms Dean: I'd just like to supplement, Mr. Speaker. What the variance is tied to is predominantly wage costs associated with additional sessional hours, and as the Speaker noted, some of it relates to security staff. The other elements there are costs for pages, *Hansard* staff, of course, and labour costs for broadcasting.

The Chair: The Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Hodgson, is with us today and the other staff who have detailed information with respect to this. You will see in this particular area that as we worked towards the parameter targets, which we approved in this committee, we've shifted money around to achieve that target. Other areas have been reduced in order to achieve that. We still were successful in meeting the approximately 1 per cent reduction overall, but some areas grew, and it's driven by the demand that we were experiencing. In others we felt we could shift resources to these. There's one other area that we would be shifting resources.

Questions? Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess we've seen an increase because of the change in hours. If there was agreement from the government to limit the sitting hours in the evenings, would we be able to realize the same amount of – who am I asking this question to? Ms Dean, perhaps. If we had some assurances from the government in terms of the total amount of time that we would be sitting in the evenings, would then we be able to restructure this budget so there wasn't a significant increase?

Ms Dean: Well, we budget based on the standing order requirements, and because there's been a change with respect to the

standing orders in terms of additional sessional hours, that's how we have to handle the budgeting for the wage staff.

Mr. Cooper: So does the budget account or take into consideration that there would be some evening sittings, then?

Ms Dean: We look at the average number of hours. Just by way of comparison, we took some statistics from last spring, where we were sitting for two weeks and we sat an average of 5.3 hours a day, whereas after the standing order changes in the fall we sat over eight hours a day. So that builds into the equation.

1:30

Mr. Cooper: So if there was a change in the standing orders that would limit evening sittings to ensure that the average time would be more like five or six hours, that probably would have a positive impact on the budget?

Ms Dean: You know, I can't be definitive on that. The other factor to weigh into the equation is simply that security staff, pages have a minimum shift requirement of three hours. So even if you had a short evening sitting, we still have to pay people a certain amount of money.

The Chair: I think I would just add to that, Mr. Cooper. As we all know, a budget is a plan for the future. It's based upon our past experience and mitigating the balance we need. We might be much less or much more. There was a measurement used based upon this last year, and in many respects one could say that this has been a unique period in so many different ways. Nonetheless, this is an area that if in its wisdom the Assembly has more time spent in committee or the Assembly or less, this is the best guess as to what we ought to plan for in the future. If it's not spent, this would go back to the general reserve. But I think for either the government or the opposition to speculate by a change order – I'm giving a personal perspective here – I don't know that that would necessarily achieve it. It's based upon history; therefore, you need to pick a number.

Mr. Cooper: Last question, then. On a year-over-year basis how close have we been to our best guess in terms of the actuals in the past?

Ms Dean: We budget for 70 sitting days. Now, that's the current budget parameter. In years past we've gone up to 75 sitting days, but if you look at the fiscal years for the past five years, we tend to sit around 50 sitting days. Again, we are budgeting based on the sessional calendar as laid out in the standing orders, which mandates that we sit from the second week in February to the first week in June and then for a five-week sitting in the fall, so those are the parameters we use.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just real quick going back to something Mr. Cooper was asking of Ms Dean. To be clear, though, the 8.09 per cent that we're looking at right now: what I heard when you were presenting was that the reason for that increase being budgeted was primarily because of the change to the standing orders in the fall; i.e., the fact that the standing orders have changed to make the Legislature be open longer.

Ms Dean: There were changes to the standing orders that have affected the sessional days, yes.

Mr. Nixon: Okay. So it was because of the change to the standing orders, the majority of this increase.

The Chair: It was also, I think – Ms Dean, correct me if I'm wrong – based upon the evidence and analysis of the last session, spring and fall of 2015. Is that correct?

Ms Dean: Yes.

The Chair: So it's based upon experience.

Mr. Nixon: I get that it was based upon experience. Taking into account that the standing orders changed, with the experience, put those two together. That's why we figured that we needed an increase in costs for the sittings, correct?

Ms Dean: That's correct.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With these new morning sittings that have come in, I guess I'm not completely clear on the costs that we're expecting to increase. Is there an FTE breakdown that we can see just so that we can understand, you know, where this increase is being asked for? Essentially, all I'm hearing is that we've added some days, but there's this cost.

Ms Dean: Sure. I can provide some information on that. Of the \$660,000 increase, about \$535,000 pertains to wage costs for staff. If you break that down, you know, the incremental cost per sessional hour is approximately \$3,800.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. In the past on average how many evening sittings have there been per year, scheduled versus what we actually did?

Ms Dean: You know, Mr. Nielsen, I don't have those statistics handy. I've got all sorts of sitting day statistics here for you. I don't have the average number of evening sittings. I can tell you that in recent years we've tended to sit a couple of nights a week, but that's based on a motion that has to get passed at the beginning of a session.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. But fair to say, then, that obviously there is, you know, a financial implication to having all the staff available in the night sittings, and when we don't, there isn't. Am I following that correctly?

Ms Dean: That's correct. You have to keep in mind also that sometimes we might have an evening sitting that's only an hour, but we still have to pay staff for a three-hour shift.

Mr. Nielsen: I see. Okay. I guess based on – it's 70 sessional hours . . .

Ms Dean: Days.

Mr. Nielsen: Days. Sorry.
. . . with an estimate of 35 hours a week.

Ms Dean: What we're going by are some statistics that we calculated just based on the sessional hours from the sitting in the fall, following the standing orders changes.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. For a total of 17 and a half weeks?

Ms Dean: That's correct. So it's 140 extra hours.

Mr. Nielsen: Would the, I guess, comparative statistics that we have on the Assembly website – and the Speaker had alluded to, obviously, last year being a bit of an anomaly. The House actually sat for 42 days with 175 hours. Is that correct?

Ms Dean: Well, I'm not sure which year you're talking about.

Mr. Nielsen: For 2014. Sorry.

Ms Dean: Okay. For the fiscal year of 2014-15 that was a bit of an aberration because we had a change in leadership. There were 37 sitting days. An average session day was 5 hours. You go back a couple of years prior, 50 sitting days in 2013-14; 2012-2013 – again a little bit of an aberration because there was an election in that period – 40 sitting days; 2011-2012, 50 sitting days.

But, again, I must emphasize that we look at the requirement for the calendar that's in the standing orders. Now, sometimes we don't start as early as the second week in February, but we base our budget on what's in the standing orders.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay.

The Chair: Further questions? Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. I think, really, part of it, when it comes down to it, what I'm seeing in this budget is that the budget increases come out from the House services branch, but the details of what those expenses are – you're clarifying some of it for us, but we are unable to clearly identify what those increases are for. We don't have the measurements of what those are for. I mean, Mr. Nielsen here was kind of clarifying: can we understand what the FTEs are, the numbers for those, what are the implications, what are the savings from not having as many evening sittings as previously estimated? So there's some lack of information here that we were hoping to clear up with some of the questions that we have. I guess the question is – you know, there are more questions around the lack of implications.

I know in Leg. Offices we've worked really diligently to make sure that they are able to fulfill their mandates within their current budgets. So when we're seeing an increase in a budget right now, then I'm really wondering why that is, and I'm not seeing that explanation clearly spelled out. We're trying to identify some of those things throughout the questions here.

1:40

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas, I would just like to clarify one point. All of the MLAs will need to determine their experience from other committees. I need to emphasize that overall the Legislative Assembly Office is approximately at minus 1 percentage, so overall the expenses have been reduced. As I said earlier, there's been some shift.

Now, notwithstanding that, if there are some detailed points that are not clear here, again, a budget is a plan. We can estimate. If we want to reduce our best guess of the good intentions of all of the parties in the Assembly, then we can reduce this number to whatever the committee decides. The detailed questions are legitimate, but I just want to emphasize that overall the target has been met so that there's no misunderstanding.

Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you. I guess for myself, you know, as an MLA and as sort of the front line, Albertans are going to be coming to me with those questions, I just want to make sure I have those answers

for them because I'm pretty sure, given our climate that we're in right now, that we're going to be pressed for those.

The Chair: Rightly so, and we should be able to explain that.

Ms Dean, to Member Cortes-Vargas's point, can we get into greater detail?

Ms Dean: I'd certainly look to my colleague the Sergeant-at-Arms to assist with any additional details he'd like to offer. But, again, the bulk of the \$660,000 increase relates to wage costs associated with a budget parameter of eight additional hours per week. We budget on the basis of the standing orders requirements. At the end of the day, if the Assembly does not sit those days, that money is returned to the general revenue fund, as the Speaker pointed out. We budget on the basis of the sessional calendar as laid out in the standing orders in order to avoid the need for a supplementary estimate at a later date.

The Chair: Mr. Hodgson, do you have any comments you'd like to make?

Mr. Hodgson: Well, I'd just emphasize what the Acting Clerk, procedure, mentioned, that the predominant cost drivers for the security budget relate to the amended sessional hours. Now, there are some other factors in there that relate to the expanded programming on the site here, the increased number of committee meetings and the requirement to provide security services for them – I can speak to those if you like and take, you know, specific questions – and the security arrangements that were put in place and enhanced after a serious analysis of the situation which occurred in Ottawa on the 22nd of November, 2014.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess from my perspective at the end of the day the government made a decision to expand the sitting hours, and there is a cost associated with that. What they haven't done is made a commitment in the standing orders that would allow members of our staff team here at the LAO to budget accordingly so that the change wouldn't have a budgetary impact because of the expansion of the total number of sitting hours that we sit.

If, as the Wildrose mentioned, limiting night sittings or providing some proposals that if we sit in the morning it means we don't have a night sitting, that would mean that there was not nearly as large of an increase to the total potential hours that the House would sit, and as a result, we wouldn't have had to see this increase. Unfortunately, that's not what we saw. In the previous session we saw the government sitting numerous evenings quite late into the night, with some nights where we're sitting 13, 14, up to 14 and a half hours in one day. There is a real, hard cost for those hours, and that's what we see here.

The Chair: Would it be fair, Mr. Cooper, to say that the collective House, though, determined the total number of hours, which included the number of questions that were asked and the extent of member comments that were made? Wasn't it a shared responsibility?

Mr. Cooper: Well, I think, you know, that question would be best put to the Government House Leader as the standing orders change was predominantly driven by the government.

Mr. van Dijken: It's important to note that the budget is based off of the sessional calendar and the sessional calendar is based off of hours . . .

The Chair: Sorry, I'm having difficulty. Speak up a little bit.

Mr. van Dijken: It's important to note that the budget is based off of the sessional calendar, so hours per day based on the sessional calendar would have an impact on budget as opposed to hours of questions.

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Absolutely. I think that, one, I would really love to see the breakdown of the programming costs as mentioned by the Sergeant-at-Arms. Two, as we're talking about the Government House Leader, we also heard him say that we will have a considerable reduction in evening sittings. We're also talking about sessional days. Do these estimated sessional days also include constituency weeks? If so, why is this? Do they not?

Ms Dean: Member Cortes-Vargas, the sessional days are true sessional days, determined as per the calendar outlined in standing orders. That number does take into account a constituency week after three sitting weeks.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. Is that the same practice as in other jurisdictions?

The Chair: I don't know the answer.

Ms Dean: I can't comment on that. I mean, I think it's standard to have a sessional calendar and to budget on the basis of a sessional calendar.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In listening to the debate so far and observing the conversation, I find some of the questions from our friends in the ND caucus a little odd. To me, as I understand it – and anyone around the table can correct me if I'm wrong about this – this is a simple mathematical calculation based on what is in the standing orders. Full stop. That's it. There are costs to provide security to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. There are costs for Parliamentary Counsel. There are costs to keep the lights on. That's what this is. Should we find that we sit less, then costs will go down. Should we find that we sit more, the costs will go up. That's a decision that's been made based on the way the standing orders are currently written, which have been recently changed in this Legislative Assembly.

We ended up sitting quite a number of evenings in the fall; we may find that we don't sit so many evenings. To me this just seems like a simple, straightforward mathematical calculation based on the way the standing orders are. I also interpret this to be perhaps – you know, based on those standing orders, should we sit less, it'll be less. So I don't know where the concern comes from. This doesn't feel to me like it's a department, and – trust me – I'm as vigilant, perhaps more so than most, on administrative costs of any kind, operating costs of any kind. This is not something, I think, when we're talking about security, that we want to be cutting corners on. It just is what it is. Parliamentary Counsel is staffed the way it's staffed; that's not going to change.

Again, I'm confused by these questions and what the concern actually is. Thank you.

Mrs. Schreiner: I don't think that we're looking at cutting corners. I think we're just asking for clarification, just a little bit of a breakdown so we can be accountable.

The Chair: I'm sensing that some of the members need more explanation about the drivers for that cost. I'm going to leave it to staff to speak in greater detail. These are not full-time hours, but I think there are some FTE increases in here with respect to security and pages, et cetera. Maybe Ms Dean or Mr. Hodgson can just elaborate.

Ms Dean: There's an addition of approximately three FTEs associated with these additional hours.

Mr. Hodgson: Those that work in support of session as pages or security are wage staff. The cost per week, as the amended standing orders have laid out, is approximately \$16,000. That's \$280,000 for a 17-and-a-half-week budgeted session. That is the cost of the amended standing orders.

1:50

Ms Dean: If I may supplement the Sergeant-at-Arms, that's related to security. *Hansard* is \$165,000. There are additional labour costs associated with broadcasting, and that's identified as \$52,000. Again, if we want more details, we have calculated the incremental cost per sessional hour as \$3,800.

If I may just comment, Mr. Speaker, the administration is not passing judgment on the change to the standing orders. We're just trying to implement the changes and budget accordingly.

The Chair: Now, if the committee wishes, it certainly can – and I think this is the place we need to decide that. If the committee in confidence thinks that the total number of hours will in fact be managed, then this is an area where, since it's a budget estimate, we could reduce that amount. It still might, however, reach the entire – you know, it's a management of risk issue. Do you guess that we're going to reduce the number of hours that we're meeting, or are we going to increase?

What's the wish of the committee? Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: I'm just a little unclear. Are you asking that we vote on this at this point?

The Chair: No, no. I'm not. No.

Mr. Cooper: What are you . . .

The Chair: Just looking for some direction. We come back to the summary if you'd like to address something specific here. We'll do it at the end, I hope, as an omnibus.

Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that, personally, I would feel more comfortable with details in front of me so that should questions come up, I'd have the ability to say, "This is why; this is where it's happening; this was the reasoning that was happening," rather than just: "Well, we have these projected days. This is what we're hoping; maybe it won't be or will be." I'm more comfortable with those details in front of me, so if I may, I would like to propose a motion.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, it's certainly the will of the committee to determine when to introduce a motion. I would respectfully ask you to make the point that you're considering and, maybe after we've gone through the balance of the budget, then visit the motion you're proposing at that time.

Mr. Nielsen: Absolutely.

The Chair: Okay. That would be my preference, if you would.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah, we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Good.

On that, noted, there seems to be a need. On the point, though – in fact, it may even be possible today; I see staff here – maybe with the permission of the others: what would be the additional kind of detail that you want to see? The number of person-hours?

Mr. Nielsen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was hoping to maybe see, you know, the breakdown with sort of comparable actual costs from 2014-15. I wouldn't mind seeing an exact breakdown of those increased costs that they're proposing, again just for that comfort level, that I can then explain later to my constituents should they be asking.

The Chair: Well, I know that that information is available. How readily it's available I'm not exactly certain.

So it's the number of person-hours, the comparables from last year. Anything else?

Mr. Nielsen: From 2014-15. As you said, the last was a little bit of an anomaly, so I don't think that would be very fair, to try to ask the LAO to compare to that.

The Chair: Okay. We might recess at some point here. I think we're all driven by the desire to, if we can, get the detailed information here today so that some kind of a decision can be reached on a go-forward basis.

Ms Dean: Mr. Speaker, I think we have that information right now.

In terms of full-time equivalents last year it would be 59.10. With the change in parameters it's 62.85. So in terms of human resource expenses, again, that's a \$644,000 change. Now, we had a human resource budget in the neighbourhood of \$6.5 million last year, but we're not going to be spending all of that money because of the election, which meant that we had fewer sessional days and fewer committee meetings.

The Chair: What about 2014-15?

Ms Dean: I don't have those forecasts handy. Maybe Mr. Ellis does.

The Chair: Mr. Ellis, is that reasonably available here today?

Mr. S. Ellis: I could get them in a few minutes if that's the will, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Scarlett: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Scarlett: If we historically look at the components of the budget year over year over year, going back to two years ago and again last year – again, the approved parameters that were provided to us were to prepare each of those budgets in this area based on the sessional days and the committee days. Going back, that's how each budget has been prepared. Again, we emphasize that dependent upon how many actual days and hours the Assembly sat in each fiscal year, for all of the support staff under this umbrella those were the hours that were actually expended. But the parameters previously – and that's what we presented last week – were to adopt the strategy that we are indeed using a formula to budget, of course, with the understanding that whatever those actual hours and expenses are, that is truly what is being expended.

I believe that we're trying to compare different scenarios from 2014 versus the scenario from 2015 in terms of actual hours and changes that have been made. In addition, as was already expressed,

2015 was an election year, so when we commenced session and when we sat were different than in a year when there is no election. There are several variables.

We are not at all debating that the money that is spent towards what it takes to staff based on how many hours we sit in any given fiscal year is truly what's expended. However, for budget purposes only there has in the past been an adopted formula. When we came to the table at the last meeting, that adopted formula was presented, building in the variance as a result of the changes. Based on that, we went away and for budget purposes only came back with that.

The other point, that has already been mentioned, is that within the LAO branches, in terms of preparing this, we also acknowledge that the core business of this House is supporting the activities of session and the committee meetings and supporting the members. Given that we knew from a budget perspective, as we're discussing here, that there would be projected increases in some of the areas, we also looked very hard and are bringing to you proposals in terms of some offsets to be able to take and manage that because we care very deeply as well in terms of showing restraint.

The Chair: I'm going to suggest a process on how we get around this for the time being.

Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope what I'm about to say will further that aim. I respect anyone and any party and any member trying to be fiscally responsible. I think that's, of course, what we all want. I have absolutely every faith that LAO staff have that foremost in their minds in doing that, but I think it's important that my friends in the ND caucus listen to the questions that we on the opposition side are asking here, and listen also to what staff is telling you. I think it's important that you hear what the answers are.

I also think it would be interesting for me to hear what specifically your concerns are. What do you anticipate doing with the information that you receive once we get more information? I see here a 7.95 per cent increase. What I perceive perhaps as your concern is that the opposition or the media comes out and goes, "My goodness, a committee has approved a 7.95 per cent increase," and this is going to become a big media story, and Twitter is going to go mad, and people are going to be really upset. That's my sense. I wonder if that perhaps is the root of this.

2:00

What I hear, based on those questions and the responses that I'm hearing from administration, is that this is simply a formula based on the number of sitting days as prescribed in the standing orders, based on many, many years of history. Should we exceed that number, it'll be higher; should we be lower, it'll be lower. It simply is what it is. So if there's no chance that we're going to nibble around the edges and say, "Well, gosh. Perhaps we need one fewer sheriff; perhaps we can have a few hours less of Parliamentary Counsel," if this committee doesn't anticipate doing that, what is the purpose of the information? The Legislative Assembly costs what it costs to operate. That's the cost of democracy. Given that, I'm curious why the committee is hung up on this issue to the degree that it is.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, you had a point to make?

Mr. Nielsen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm interested in the details so that I have the ability to explain it to my constituents. When they come to me and say, "Why are you raising the budget by X number of dollars?" I can say, "Here's why." I do not feel comfortable being able to explain that right now. I'm certainly not

saying that the LAO isn't probably telling exactly what we need to know, but I don't understand it without it in front of me so that I have that ability to take that information back and communicate to my constituents or other Albertans should they ask me.

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas, and then I have a suggestion.

Cortes-Vargas: Going back to the details of the budget and the way it's laid out, I mean, one of the costs we're talking about here and being provided more details on is additional staffing costs for security and ceremonial services – that is, security and pages – to the cost of \$350,000. I'm not being told how many, and the details are laid out pretty clearly in other budgets that we approve as committee members in other places. We get to know numbers. We get to see those increases, and that provides accountability. We see where the processes are and where it's needed. That allows us to make informed decisions whether an observation of costs can happen or not. So what we're asking for are those details.

I can go further – additional staffing costs for *Hansard*. How many full-time? I want to see those documents, and I want to review it. We go down all of the expenses. They give the total amounts, but the actual details are missing. That's what I want to see, and I feel my members also want to discuss and make sure that it's being spent in the right way.

Mr. Hodgson: I can give you the details on the additional pages.

Cortes-Vargas: Then we would like to review it afterwards.

The Chair: Yeah. I have a suggestion. I'd like to suggest to the committee that we continue with the review of individual pages, then we recess for a short period of time to be determined, and then we reconvene. To what degree is some of that information available here today or not? Then we can judge accordingly if that's agreeable.

Visitor services I think is the next one. Is that correct? Yes. Visitor services. I think this is also Brian, and Al Chapman has just joined us. Okay. This is an area that has seen considerable – the number sticks in my mind, and I can't as I speak lay my hands on it. But I think I share with all of you some pride when I see the number of people coming through that Legislature and into this building, and I'm told that it has increased, like, 35 to 40 per cent over the last 12 months, which is quite significant. As we approach this area – I think this is one of the areas that we have as a part of our shared desire to have an improved engagement in the democratic process. This is probably one of the areas that's at the point of that sword. We need to be welcoming people to this place, this centre of democracy.

Brian and Al are here to speak to the details. We saw some significant changes. For those of you who have been in that store and that space that's used by the public in the building we're in now: it is really quite something we all should be proud of. But it does cost money. I'll let Brian and Al speak to the details. Again, there are no staff increases or merit increases, but, driven by supply and demand, there is a demand for improved services.

Mr. Hodgson, Mr. Chapman, like to elaborate?

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I think you've summarized it. The visitor centre opened on the 1st of July. In the 2015 calendar we saw a 34 per cent increase in our visitorship, which I attribute to the visitor centre being opened. We added 13,000 square feet of space and a significant amount of programming. We had a human resource plan that was synchronized with the visitor centre to the extent that we were able to do so, and the request that you have before you simply reflects the demand for our services. If we've

gone up 34 per cent in about half a year, a little bit more than half a year, I would suggest that that trend is going to continue. So there you are.

The visitor centre, of course, opened up programming and opportunities that did not exist before. It had to be staffed and looked after, and I'm sure that all the members here will have been through the visitor centre. The gift shop, for example, Alberta Branded, is roughly two and a half times what it was in the pedway, and the other offerings that we have, of course, did not exist before we opened the visitor centre.

The Chair: Now, anticipating what the question might be, I guess, to the last page: this represents how many FTEs, when you add them all together, an incremental increase of . . .

Mr. Hodgson: I think three, 3.5 roughly.

Mr. Chapman: From 26.65 to 30.5.

The Chair: Okay. In this case, anticipating what may be some questions, whereas we may have the debate about the number of sessional hours, there is a historical pattern there. Based upon the new world that we're in, this particular item does not have much of a good comparator for us to compare it to in relative terms because we haven't yet been through a full year in here with these services to offer to the public. Am I correct?

Mr. Hodgson: Yes, sir. As most members will know, the visitor centre and, indeed, the Legislature Building are open 362 days a year, and certainly we don't charge admission, as you all know. We also have other on-site programming that most of you will be familiar with: Canada Day, which last year, I think, there were in excess of 70,000, 75,000 people who attended; Family Day; and other events throughout the year.

The Chair: I can also tell the committee – and, again, I only know the broad generalities – that this is the area of School at the Legislature, the mock Legislature, the education office, those kinds of programs particularly aimed at youth. I can tell you that I've had a class from my own constituency but also other MLAs'. That demand for those visits to the Legislature by school groups has a wait period of something in the order of six to eight months, as I understand. Is that correct?

Mr. Hodgson: Yes. We've got a lot of repeat customers, as it were. I think we can accommodate 34 classes in the School at the Legislature program per year. That's based on the school calendar and the availability of folks on the site here. But beyond that, we've been able to basically double our school visit capability based on the fact that the visitor centre is now up and we're able to use that. Our capacity has increased. With a capacity increase, of course, there's a cost involved in sustaining that demand.

The Chair: Members: questions?
Speaker's office. No. Sorry.

Mr. Piquette: Sorry. Have we already gone past visitor services?

The Chair: Yeah. Were there any questions on visitor services?

Mr. Piquette: Yeah, actually.

The Chair: Okay. Sorry. I didn't hear anything.

2:10

Mr. Piquette: No; sorry about that. Yeah. I really appreciate the information that's been provided. I think I get a bit of an idea of

where the increase is coming from. I mean, normally, you know, I would be very strongly in favour of doing what we can to increase the access to the Legislature to the public, and I appreciate the efforts that people have done. I'm just kind of a bit unclear. I'm not sure. As you said yourself, Mr. Speaker, we don't really have a history to be able to draw on to be able to project adequately.

I know that we might have had some exceptional events happen over 2015-2016. I'm thinking in particular of the Magna Carta exhibition. I know that there was a very long waiting list. I'm wondering if that might not have been a bit of an exceptional event. I'm not sure about projecting forward from that increase in number of visitors. I think, perhaps, this budget is maybe erring a bit too much on the side of – you know, maybe they're putting more in there than we need to have. We are in very, very challenging times, and I'm just not clear if that's necessarily going to be – I wonder if maybe you could give a bit more information on just kind of why you would expect that increase in visitor uptake to be continuing over the coming year.

Mr. Hodgson: I would expect it to continue based on the excellent efforts of the staff that support the public education and outreach programming here. I think it's been very effective, and a lot of it has to do with word of mouth. We have a wonderful new facility. It's been cross-sold by a number of organizations from Edmonton Economic Development and Edmonton Tourism to Travel Alberta to the Downtown Business Association and hotels. We are fanning out, and that is bearing fruit, I think.

You mentioned the Magna Carta. There were four destinations in Canada the Magna Carta was displayed at. We had it for the shortest period of time, but we had the second in terms of the overall number of folks that would visit. It is our intent and, indeed, we have a plan to display in the Borealis Gallery four temporary exhibits a year, roughly, and those are promoted through a variety of means, social media being one. So do we anticipate that the visitor trend will continue? The answer to that question is yes. Absolutely. I think there's a greater interest in what members are doing, and that's why people are coming down here, one reason. There are other reasons.

Mr. Chapman: Our increase last year was 56,990 visitors, and of that 22,082 were Magna Carta related, so we took that into effect when we looked at next year's budget, to projections. That was a bit of an anomaly. It was a large number, so when we factored it in, we realized that we're not going to have that kind of a blip in five weeks every single year. We took that into consideration when we looked at the costs for running the visitor centre because the theatre has extra costs with the fluids, with all the things that go into the 4-D show downstairs.

We also have a lot of schools that come in. We have a new education centre that's coming online next year, so we know there will be more demand for the mock Legislature and the School at the Legislature classroom. Brian alluded to 34 weeks; we're actually up to 37 weeks this year, and that could go up to closer to potentially 40 weeks next year as well as some summer programs. Taking all that into effect, we're trying to make more access for Albertans across the province to here. We're getting more schools from across the province because we can offer now two-day programs, where in the past we could only offer a one-day tour of the building. Now schools are coming for two days and touring the building. They drive in the morning, they come and do afternoon programs, they stay overnight, they do the visitor centre the next day, and they drive back home the next day.

We've expanded our reach across the province to different areas that we've never been able to before. Constituencies in the far north of the province and far south of the province: schools couldn't come

in. It wasn't economical. Now they can visit from those regions. We're looking at the trends, taking aside Magna Carta, pushing it over to here, and actually looking at the actual trends of other school groups coming in.

Mr. Piquette: How much of that projected increase can be traced to the expansion of the school program in isolation? I'm not sure that I see that.

Mr. Chapman: When we look under the section with other labour and services – other labour and services is kind of the main area – and our postage and freight, because we have to bring these new exhibitions in, that's where the new costs are going, as the shipping and handling and then the programming costs in those areas. Are those the two areas you're looking for?

Mr. Piquette: Okay. So it's in shipping.

What about for extra employees or extra hours? Because, I mean, from my understanding these are waged employees as well, or . . .

Mr. Chapman: Wage employees that were hired this year: they were hired in the second and third quarter. We looked at what they were working in some of those months, November and actually January this year, and then we took into effect the other hours they are working. Correct.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. And that's because – I see you accommodate it within the 2015-2016 numbers. So that's for the additional, because it's a pro-rated amount. Is that what I'm understanding?

Mr. Chapman: For 2015-16 up to 2016-17 that increase took into account the more hours, yes. So we took what they worked in the fall for that part of that year and then expanded that into the full year for 2016-17. Correct.

Mr. Piquette: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Piquette: Oh, sorry.

The Chair: Sorry. One more question, Mr. Piquette?

Mr. Piquette: Oh, no. I was just going to say that I think that – you know, I just want to reiterate kind of what Mr. Speaker had to say, where I think that if we'd have had more details within these estimates, it would make these easier to be able to go through.

And thank you, sir.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to make two points. The details that we received under tabs 1, 2, 3 are not materially different than the details we see under tabs 4 and 5. There's no more or less information. There are no itemized line item details in those. The only difference is that the budgets are either flat or less. While I understand when we see percentage changes in the 7.95 per cent, 15.16 per cent – those are significant numbers – I do want to draw all committee members' attention, however, to the summary, which you'll find under the estimates summary tab, the very last page immediately before tab 1.

I want to draw your attention to the very bottom line. We always talk about the bottom line. Let's talk about the bottom line. This overall budget for '16-17 is \$331,000 less. So if anyone's constituents come and say, "Gosh. Why are you spending more money?" you can say, "In fact, we're not in this area." Specifically related to planning and development initiatives, which have been

cut by more than half, we haven't got that far yet. That's tab 16. If you have a look at that, it's itemized and detailed as to where staff have gone to great lengths to find savings in a difficult time.

While I'm not a voting member of this committee, I am a member of the Assembly, and as you, I'm sure, hopefully, have noticed by now, I have a strong interest in ensuring that we exercise good fiscal discipline over every single thing that we do. Speaking for myself, I have absolutely no concerns with the expenditure in visitor services or the expenditure in House services. I think overall we have a budget that goes down by \$331,000, or half a per cent. That, I think, shows to Albertans that we're serious about managing their money well while also keeping the doors open, literally keeping the doors open, in Alberta's democratic institutions. That's what we're talking about here.

Thank you.

The Chair: I would like to suggest – I think the point is being made – that we address this issue in a recess with staff. Are there some other areas that we can prioritize less or more? I think that's the substance of what you're asking, Mr. Piquette. We will go back to that summary page, and, as Mr. Clark has indicated, that's going to be the time that we bring new information. If you determine, based on the information, that it's not adequate, then we'll have to do Plan B and/or make a decision based upon making an arbitrary decision here today, okay?

IT services. You'll note that in this area it's been reduced by about 1.25 per cent. This is the world that we all now live in, and I can tell you that many late nights I've phoned IT and got a warm body at the end who would talk to me and guide me through the forest of information technology.

Mrs. Scarlett.

2:20

Mrs. Scarlett: Thank you. Again, the top half of the text takes and briefly summarizes the branch operations. Again, we are totally autonomous on behalf of the Assembly and believe very strongly in ensuring the IT security of all members. What we take and provide covers all of the technology that's in your constituency offices within our precincts here and for members. Based on that, taking a look at our operations, again, we are projecting a \$61,000 decrease, which is reflective of a decrease in benefit costs and, as well, a decision that one or two of our projects, more in-house, not as they affect members, will and can be deferred to another time.

The Chair: Any questions?

Hearing none, I will move to the Speaker's office. There is a reduction here of about a bit more than 2 per cent, pretty much a status quo. We have recognized that we have to do our part. If there are some other areas in this thing that we need to change, I'm certainly prepared to consider them. Based upon my best judgment, what I've learned in the last six or eight months here is that this is a reasonable approach. Have you any questions for me? Mr. Cooper. I hope I can answer your question.

Mr. Cooper: If not, I'm sure that somebody will be able to assist us. I'm just looking for a little bit of clarification, a little bit better understanding, not specifically to your budget, but I see it in a number of different columns or spread out to a number of different areas. I'm just a little bit curious about pay to Members of the Legislative Assembly. I see it in your office. I see it in MLA administration. Does the MLA pay get broken up into multiple categories, or what is the difference there?

Mr. S. Ellis: The bulk of the MLA indemnity and expenses all appears in the MLA administration area. However, the Speaker is

entitled to an indemnity amount as well, and therefore it appears in his Speaker's budget. I'm not sure what the other department or other branch that you were referring to was where you found some MLA pay.

Mr. Cooper: Committees, but I assume that's for chairs or deputy chairs.

Mr. S. Ellis: Correct.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Yeah. It's all good now. I get it now. Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This will sound like an odd question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. On the operational expenses for the Speaker's office of travel, at \$21,000, I know that part of the Speaker's duties, which I support, is quite a bit of outreach and going to other places. Is that all of your travel budget, or does some of your travel budget reside in other parts of the overall Legislative Assembly budget? This is your chance, in case it's all there, to say: I really travel cheaply. I'm surprised it's that low, and I'm not campaigning for more, but my question is: is there travel money that resides in other places that's not represented here?

The Chair: I'm going to get Mr. Reynolds to speak to this. The short answer to your question is yes. We'll speak to that under the parliamentary, in my capacity as president of the Canadian Parliamentary Association. We can speak to that detail. You guys can't make quick decisions in meetings like this, so I haven't been able to travel very much.

Mr. McIver: We feel bad about that, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: You create another reason for us to meet again, so I have to be here.

Mrs. Scarlett: Just to supplement, in terms of the allowances related to travel in your role as a member, that is under a different budget, but the travel that you see here is for your role as Speaker.

The Chair: There's also some parliamentary. Is that correct, Rob?

Mr. Reynolds: You know, actually, I don't want to pass the buck, but I'll do exactly that. Scott may be able to answer that. I believe that the travel that's in that budget relates to your travel in Alberta. But Scott can go ahead with that.

Mr. S. Ellis: Well, a lot of it is in Alberta, but just to refer to the Speaker's office travel budget, that is the budget that allows or facilitates the Speaker going out and visiting constituency offices, as has been the practice of past Speakers, to get a feel from the ground level as to what's really happening there, what improvements are needed or what issues exist. So that's largely the travel that's reflected in the Speaker's office.

With respect to interparliamentary travel, that is another branch within the House services that Rob oversees. With respect to other travel – i.e., travel as a member – for all members that would be under MLA administration where you would see air travel, automobile claims, et cetera. That would all be under the MLA administration budget. Does that clear that?

Mr. McIver: Well, a little bit more clear, but it still leaves some out for me. So you've got your MLA travel. That's separate. You've got this piece. Is there any other travel budget that you have, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: No. This, as I understand it – and I think I've used . . .

Mr. McIver: Because I heard some talk about Parliamentary Counsel travel or something in some other budget, so where is that at? Where do we find that?

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. It's not Parliamentary Counsel travel for the Speaker; it's interparliamentary travel. That would be under travel in the House services budget.

Mr. McIver: In House services. Okay. Now we're getting somewhere. What line number is that, if you don't mind? That's just \$228,000? Is that it?

Mr. Reynolds: If you'll just bear with me for a moment.

The Chair: While he's looking for that, Ric, in that \$228,000 sometimes it's me; sometimes it's a Deputy Speaker, and it's also that several of you have attended various parliamentary professional development sessions around the province, largely, but also in the country. That's where all MLAs that Mr. Reynolds is speaking to would be charged. We've tried in this past year, I think, to ensure that it's a fairly equitable distribution to all of the caucuses to participate in them, and all of the feedback that I've received thus far from members who have attended those meetings has been that they've been very worth while and much has been learned from them. So there are some additional responsibilities that I have that would be attributable to that, but I would be no different from any other MLA in terms of attending a session.

Mr. McIver: Okay. So that includes Speaker travel, Deputy Speaker travel, and MLAs travelling on Speaker business?

The Chair: Well, on parliamentary business, I think.

Mr. McIver: All right. Pardon me.

The Chair: It's professional development.

Mr. McIver: You've corrected me nicely. I appreciate that. Parliamentary business. Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: I had a profound thought. It seems to have escaped right now. That has happened to me in the past.

To the legislative committees. Shannon.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is pretty much a reduction in the overall committee budget of 1.47 per cent. As you know, this area funds eight standing committees, one special standing committee. Currently we have what we call the super special committee as well. During the next fiscal year there will be two additional special committees that will be required because under provincial law there are two statutory reviews that are mandated, and those are dealing with the Child and Youth Advocate Act and the Lobbyists Act.

That's all I have to offer unless there are any questions.

2:30

The Chair: Seeing none, MLA administration budget. That would be all of us. This area is projected at a 1.2 per cent reduction. Details are there in the narrative. This represents members' allowances, the pay and benefits to MLAs. Fort McMurray: apparently, in the past there's been an allowance for that office, which is in here. There's staff benefits funding for the people who work with us. There is – I don't exactly understand the details of it – for the 55th, 57th parallel earlier history about northern regions of the province. It includes

our offices and communication, promotional, and matrix-based elements. Again, that's a formula-driven factor.

Any questions?

I was trying to think up, Mr. McIver, a question to ask you about your travel, but I couldn't think of one, so we're going to move to the next.

Mr. McIver: I drove in, sir.

The Chair: Yeah. I know. There's a great bus service, too.

Tab 10, government members' services. Now, I had some discussions with staff about these. It's important to realize, I think, that all of these should probably be addressed as a group, from Official Opposition back to tab 15. The reference to last year: Scott, you can correct me if I'm wrong; this is what I understand. The numbers changed. Based upon the previous numbers, I guess the most obvious one might be the government caucus for the PCs, whereas in this instance this is the government caucus for the New Democrats. They had much fewer in the previous year, but it's driven by the number of members they have. The converse, of course, is true with the PCs as well as the other parties. Generally is that right? It's the '16-17 number? It's driven by the number of members, correct?

Mr. S. Ellis: Yes, primarily. The budgets are determined – over history we have a private member amount that's applied to the number of members in the current caucus. We have research dollars that are allocated based on the relative size of the caucuses, and those have been predetermined by representatives of House leaders from all the parties. There are also leaders' office allowances where it's recognized that they have a leader in their particular caucus.

What you were speaking of earlier was the comparative information from '15-16, and what we tried to do there is to provide information from the previous year that was about the same caucus. In other words, we're comparing one caucus, the same caucus, in both years as opposed to a different caucus in different years, which would be somewhat frivolous, I think. It doesn't really reflect anything that's of meaningful value. That being the case, we basically list in '16-17 the current caucus, number of members, et cetera, and we compare it with that previous year's caucus numbers just for comparative purposes. Obviously, there's a huge change that occurred between '15-16 and '16-17.

The Chair: This is an area that, again, this year I will probably be talking to all of the caucuses about. I have some questions about this area, but those need to be addressed in greater detail because I need some more information.

Are there any questions from the committee on tabs 10 to 15? Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a couple of clarifying questions with respect to the independent Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow. I just wanted to make sure that the spending decisions that were made or not made were done with the proper authority when it comes to the two members. And let me just say at the outset that I don't have a significant desire to make drastic changes to the budgets but only to ensure that the authority that granted any of their budgets was done in a prudent fashion and, in turn, if we were to accept these budgets, that we were also acting in a prudent fashion.

I find it a bit surprising that the two independent MLAs – when you add up both of their budgets, it is approximately slightly over half of the budget of the eight-person PC caucus, about \$670,000 when you add up the two independent members' budgets compared

to about \$1.1 million that the PC caucus receives. It doesn't seem very fair. Far be it for me to defend the PCs for anything they've done or might do in the future . . .

Mr. McIver: Bless you, my son.

Mr. Cooper: Yes.

. . . but it does seem strange.

Many folks around this table and in the Assembly have come to learn that I like the procedure and I like the process of the Assembly and of the committees and how they all work. The process is very important to me, and I want to just get some sense of how we arrived here.

The parliamentary precedent on determining official party status: unless the official party status is crystal clear, that party isn't an official party. In this case, with individual members of the Assembly, they may not meet party status. It's typical, that we see across multiple jurisdictions – and I have some points of reference if anyone cares to see them – that the Speaker would consult with a committee to make that determination to then provide recognition on status. In Ottawa the Speaker would consult with the Board of Internal Economy. Here it's likely that Members' Services would be consulted, but I don't recall a meeting that took place that would provide official party status to the two independent members.

Certainly, the two caucuses have been given caucus management money when most would accept that they can't be a caucus if they're a caucus of one. That precedent in Alberta was established in 2004 to 2008. The precedent that I'll refer to is what I am most familiar with, when Paul Hinman was the then leader of the Alberta Alliance and was their only MLA. He didn't receive any caucus management funds, which makes sense because he's only one individual, and at that time he only received the per-member allowance, which for interest's sake was \$58,000. I can't see how we arrived here to grant the extra dollars for caucus leadership activities when there is no caucus to lead, just an individual member.

2:40

These funds are not just given to MLAs or caucuses, but they are because there is a party, a leader that has a caucus in the Assembly. That was established in Alberta in 2010, when this committee, the Members' Services Committee, decided that the Wildrose caucus of the day, who had a three-member caucus – and the leadership wasn't inside the Assembly; it was outside of the Assembly – then didn't receive any resources for a leadership allowance, as we see the independent members in the Assembly receiving today.

I am happy to be corrected. I, in fact, would love to be corrected and have a better understanding of how we arrived here. The fact that there's a pretty significant amount of resources: it's quite likely that I could even support that, but it seems to me that caucus leadership funds require two prerequisites, that there be a caucus and that the leader of the caucus be elected. It seems to me that we have one of those prerequisites here, so I want to make sure that as we move forward, we have a real sense of: by what authority did the Speaker or the previous Speaker decide that one MLA, an independent member of the Assembly, was entitled to a caucus leader's budget, and if that is the case, why did they receive the funds to manage a caucus of one? I'm just hoping for some additional information there, and, again, I would love to be corrected and understand.

Now, I know that determining a party's status varies across the country – and the Legislative Assembly Act certainly does refer to party status in certain sections – but, you know, as we look across the country, we see that Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan both require

two members. Anyway, there's a bunch of precedent across the country, that if anyone is so intrigued in reading political parties and parliamentary recognition, I have a copy of here today.

If I could just maybe get some clarification from you on how we arrived here.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, thank you. In my introductory comments on this subject that was one of the things that I was signalling, that I would like to spend more time on and better understand how we arrived at this. There is a long history with various precedents that have been set. Mr. Reynolds, I think, could probably speak to that in detail. There were some decisions made in the past that, at least for the interim period in this budget, are proposed to continue, but I intend to re-examine that and have discussions with all of the parties to determine what we may or may not do on a go-forward basis this year.

Mr. Reynolds: Certainly, there is a history, that others may wish to speak to. I just want to point out that the recognized party component relates only to the salary of someone who is the leader, so there are two things at play here. One is the statutory requirement for "recognized opposition party," and that relates to the salary or the amount paid to the leader, okay? What is in the budget here, that you're talking about, is the leader's office allowance, which is a totally different animal, as it were, and that's something that has been decided by Members' Services for years and years. That's within the jurisdiction of the committee to determine.

The salary, on the other hand. Section 42 of the Legislative Assembly Act indicates:

"recognized opposition party" means a party that

- (a) is represented in the Assembly by at least 4 Members, and
- (b) received at least 5% of the popular vote in the general election . . .

And it just says:

- (2) There shall be paid to a Member who is the leader of a recognized opposition party . . . an allowance at a rate . . . prescribed by the Members' Services Committee that is not less than 25% of the rate . . . payable to a member of the Executive Council.

So that just relates to salary, and you can find the amounts that are paid for that. To reiterate, it does not relate to the leader's office allowance. I know that several others, if you wanted, could comment on the history of the leader's office allowance.

The Chair: Mr. Clark and then Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, and thank you for that, Mr. Reynolds. That's very helpful. I have done some research on this myself, and I think that one very important item to note – Mr. Reynolds, actually, I'm glad you made the comments that you did because it picks up exactly where I was intending to go with this. If we want to talk specific precedent relevant to Alberta, in 1979 Grant Notley, a single MLA, received a leader's allowance of \$107,000. In today's dollars that's \$349,000. Now, that's just the leader's allowance. So there's direct precedent in Alberta that supports both Dr. Swann and I receiving the leader's allowance.

Now, in 1997 there was a lot of debate around the ND caucus at the time, and ultimately they ended up getting the leader's allowance as well in addition to official party status, which is not what I'm advocating for, but they did in fact get the allowance.

Also, I looked at the specific budget allocations for the Alberta Alliance opposition between 2004 and 2008. It actually went up substantially through that time. I don't quite know the history of it as to why that was or what the rationale was, but it wasn't just

\$58,000. It started off – well, we'll ignore 2004-05 as a partial year. But there was \$83,000 in 2005-06, and it went up as high as \$117,000 in 2009-10, and that was a partial year. The numbers I see for the Wildrose Alliance opposition in 2010-11, 2011-12 are in the order of \$406,000 for three members in 2010-11; 2011-12 was \$531,000 with only three members.

I think the reason, of course, that some staff or caucus allowance is required is that we're talking about a \$50 billion provincial budget with 21 departments. I have three staff. I think Albertans would see that as reasonable in terms of providing a robust opposition. I think that is absolutely reasonable in terms of the work that's required of those of us in single-member caucuses. I suppose that by the technical definition the word "independent" could be used. I have great fun with my friends, in particular the Wildrose caucus, bantering back and forth with the independent member, et cetera, et cetera. But I am a party leader, and that is different. It is not a situation of purely being an independent, as we had with the Member for Calgary-Bow here briefly and have had in the past; it's different.

Where I do agree with my friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills: Mr. Hinman should have received the leader's allowance in 2005-06. You know, that was in the depths of the PC entitlement at the time. I think he should have. I think by precedent he should have received it. I know for certain that at the time they made very strong arguments in favour. I think they ought to have won the day at the time. I don't know the whole history, but as I look at the actual numbers that appear there, budget allocation went up over time, so perhaps that actually did kick in at some point.

I, not surprisingly, would speak strongly in favour of maintaining the status quo as the budget numbers are laid out and also express surprise that this is coming up now. I didn't see it in your shadow budget that this was something you may tackle. But, again, we have fun with that, don't we?

I'm happy to share with the committee, Mr. Speaker, with yourself or any others some of the research that we have done on our side and happy to talk further about that either today or at another time.

Thank you.

2:50

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Chair. You know, I'm not really here to belabour the point. This isn't a me-versus-the-independent-member battle. I am mostly seeking to understand how we arrived here. I don't recall members of this committee supporting this. As such, I don't know why – listen. If the committee agrees with Mr. Clark – and it's quite possible that I agree with Mr. Clark in terms of his ability to be an active member of the Assembly. I recognize there are some nuances of leading a party outside of the Assembly and all of those challenges that he faces. But to my interpretation of where we're at today, this doesn't seem like an amount that has been approved by this committee that should have been paid to the independent members. You know, frankly, I'm a little surprised that you didn't turn it back knowing that you're so concerned about – and I support you in a lot of your concerns for reducing costs and ensuring that MLAs are as transparent as possible, and we're doing as much as we can to ensure that all of our processes are as transparent as possible.

If it's the committee's will to do this, I'm in support. I support – maybe that's an overstatement. I am comfortable with the budget, but I don't understand how we got here. Going forward, if that's the will of the committee, it changes everything. But up until this point there has been an amount paid that I don't believe has been – and

I'd like to know what authority it was paid on, I guess, is the real heart of the question.

The Chair: I'm going to have to go to staff on the history of this. I can tell you that it seems to have a colourful and unpredictable history to it, but it would, I believe – and I stand to be corrected by staff. This was a decision made after the election. I was not a part of that decision-making process. It was based upon precedent, as I understand it, that had been made by earlier Members' Services Committee meetings and/or Speakers' decisions, but I bow to Ms Dean or to Scott. Can you enlighten the member?

Mr. S. Ellis: Sure. Going back over the rich history of caucus budgets, there have been a number of situations where the principle of a recognized party has not been used to determine funding that would go to the leader who is in an unrecognized party. So the funding has varied from the requirement on the pay side to be a recognized party because there have been situations where fewer than four members have sat in a caucus and asked this committee for resources. This committee has taken those things into account and made a decision that, yes, they should get the leader's office allowance funding even though they're not a recognized party. There are multiple times in history where that is reflected. So that's the reason that it appears that way right now, and it has appeared that way in the past in a number of different situations.

The Chair: It would give some solace – these are my introductory comments to this section, and what we're dealing with here is based upon the precedent and practice that had been in place before. I would respectfully suggest, urge the committee to – you can still amend this. We still have to go back to changing or amending the budget. It would be my intention, though, to review this whole matter, bring the matter back to this committee for further discussion. Just in terms of the current timelines, et cetera, I've asked that we continue with the status quo, thus why you see it presented in the way it is. But I think, from my personal perspective as Speaker, that we need to re-examine that and be more transparent about the practice we intend to take for the year.

Mr. Cooper: Just very briefly, then, perhaps we are in a position that it would be reasonable for the committee, maybe not even with respect to the current independent members, to set up some guidelines in the future so that it's a bit more clear that this situation, the uncertainty, the pressure that it must have placed on whoever actually made the decision to grant the leader's allowance in the first place – you know, trying to figure it out from precedent and having this debate around the office. "Well, a two-member party got it, but should a one-member party?" and all of that precedent. Perhaps it would be good if we made some recommendations on a go-forward basis so that it's not as messy in the future.

Just as a brief aside, I believe that during the time between 2004 and 2008 is when the research allotment came to caucuses, so that's why we would have seen that increase, just for the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow's reference, anyway.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, and then I have a closing comment.

Mr. Clark: Speaking as the leader of the Alberta Party opposition, to my hon. friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills: I think that clearing this up is important. I would hope for and look forward to the opportunity to do that. I'll just enlighten the committee on some of the processes I sought from my perspective.

Former Speaker Zwodzesky issued a letter to myself and to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View indicating that we were

entitled to one-quarter of the leader's allowance. He did so, of course, before the current Speaker was in his chair. The reason this committee hasn't voted on that, obviously, is that this committee met for the very first time last week, so there was obviously some necessity in terms of getting things moving prior to this committee meeting.

What I've heard here from both Mr. Ellis and Mr. Reynolds is a clear indication of two very important points. One, there's a difference in recognition as an official party: four seats, greater than 5 per cent of the vote, which would trigger leader's salary and leader's research allowance. Those are different things. I'm hearing both from Mr. Ellis but also from the research I've done that there has been precisely this case in Alberta history, where a single MLA leading a party as the single representative in the Legislative Assembly was granted a leader's allowance, that being Mr. Notley in 1979, and other subsequent examples fall into the same category.

So I think it would be breaking with past precedent. Again, I can only assume that Speaker Zwozdesky used those sets of facts to make the determination that both Dr. Swann and I were entitled to the leader's allowance. I want to say in the strongest possible terms that it would be breaking with past precedent to not grant the leader's allowance to Dr. Swann and me as leaders of parties in the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you.

With the indulgence and support of the committee I would ask, given the discussion – certainly, this is an issue that I had put on my list of things to do. To the point Mr. Cooper has made, it would be my hope that, working with staff and in consultations with all of the caucuses, we might bring a report forward to the committee soon, in the next couple of months, that does provide more clarity around those guidelines that you addressed, Mr. Cooper, and give greater sense of what we ought to do in the future.

Mr. Nixon, Mr. Cooper: same point?

Mr. Nixon: I've got something on something else, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Mr. Cooper: Just very briefly, I can say that I would be in support of Mr. Clark, the leader of the Alberta Party opposition . . . [interjections] You can give me a hooray later if you want.

. . . receiving the leader's allowance and in support of this budget if we were going to ensure that the parameters were much more clear in the future.

The Chair: That would be my intent.

Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: I'm on a different topic now, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if you're ready to move on.

The Chair: Any other questions on that point?

Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: I just have a quick question. I think I'll probably be more brief than my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

The Chair: That's always been the case, I've noted.

Mr. Nixon: On the first page of this section I do note that the Official Opposition's additional caucus office is noted there.

The Chair: Page 11?

Mr. Nixon: Yes. I don't have page numbers.

I do note that the Official Opposition's additional caucus office is there. There is not one listed for the government members' caucus, which, it's my understanding, is normal. So I just have a quick question. The numbers that we see here for the government caucus: do they include a caucus office for the government members in the city of Calgary?

The Chair: Who can answer that question? Mr. Ellis.

Mr. S. Ellis: Could you repeat that question?

Mr. Nixon: The numbers that we're looking at here in regard to the government caucus, the breakdown for the government caucus in these sections: do they include costs associated with a government members' caucus office in Calgary?

Mr. S. Ellis: There's no specific budget amount relative to a caucus office for the government members' caucus. This is a global situation here, where we've got global resources on a private member basis and global dollars for research. It's not specific to anything that the caucus might choose to do with respect to an office.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Mr. Ellis, just to clarify, my understanding is that the Calgary office was instituted some time ago for the use by the Official Opposition in Calgary. Is that correct?

Mr. S. Ellis: You're talking about the Official Opposition or the government members?

The Chair: The Official Opposition.

Mr. S. Ellis: There is a specific one for the Official Opposition.

The Chair: But the government does not have any allocation in here for an office in Calgary, right?

Mr. S. Ellis: Correct.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: You've clarified, Mr. Speaker, so it's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We seem to be moving on those caucus costs.

You will note in planning and development – and Mrs. Scarlett can speak to the details here. I just wanted to share my thoughts with you at a very high level in terms of trying to give a sense of where I hope my office and the LAO might be going in the next two to three years. From a financial perspective the first numbers I saw in this category were quite significant, something in the order of \$1.5 million, so much of that reduction in cost was in this area. That was largely related to rooms such as this and the capacity and capability of them to do more in the future, which has been deferred in this plan.

From a personal perspective what I'm seeing in this category – again, maybe to the points that have been addressed around the table as we together go forward with kind of a sense of shared understanding for how we're going to address the broad Assembly initiatives, Westminster democracy you would call it, in our short time in this place, I would just share with you a couple of personal objectives that I hope I can get support for and that I intend to address. I would say that the first one is that in our Assembly I want to dialogue and meet with members of our First Nations people. I think we need to look at some kind of a more clear symbol of our Alberta history.

Secondly – and we addressed this on a number of different fronts today, various perspectives – I think we need to see this Assembly as a place for the people, so on a number of fronts I think we do need to do some outreach efforts to all regions of the province. I declare my bias, living in a rural, more regional area, that this Assembly serves all of the province, and we need to create as many threads as we can together to connect various regions.

I would like to do it all within our existing reduction in costs, still do that, but I'd like to do a little bit of a pilot. Staff are looking at this right now, so we may well be looking at some pilot projects in this coming year and then see how that goes. Then next year we would come back with a more detailed plan, depending on how that went, for rural communities that we could go to and aboriginal communities. It's my hope that we can carry the symbol of that Mace and what it means to our province on a forward basis.

With respect to the matters that were discussed with respect to the Parliamentary Association, we are all parliamentarians here. We are all members of that association, both provincially and nationally, and internationally to the Commonwealth.

I think we need to address in a concerted way and be focused on the new and emerging role of women in the parliamentary process, and I hope that we can address those matters. I've asked Deputy Speaker Ms Jabbour to kind of lead those initiatives, and she has had some discussions with all parties, I think, with regard to this item, but you can expect more. Certainly, because of money this will be low cost. We have to do any of this stuff within the confines of whatever this committee approves for a budget. I hope that together all of us from all of the caucuses can help achieve some of this.

The other one that I think we need to address and has very many dynamics and perspectives to it – it's not a simple issue – is tied back, in my mind at least, to the engagement principle. That is that I think we need to look at making the Assembly more accessible – I'm talking about the Legislature Building – for those who are young. We're talking ironically here today. We will be talking about a more family-friendly Legislature. You know, they're past it now, but a year ago some of my grandchildren and my daughters wouldn't have been able to come in. They'd have had to go to a back door because they can't push the stroller up the steps. I think we need to be looking at that. I don't expect that that will unfold now, but I hope that over a couple of years we can address that.

Clearly, tied to that, in my mind, conceptually, is the security. So we have to have that constant balance of safety in a changing world and looking at circumstances along with our desire to make this the people's place.

I'm just sharing that verbally, various ones of these. I need to have discussions with a lot of people and, most importantly, with staff as to how fast and what we do, but I simply wanted to share those views with you.

Now, with respect to this specific budget Mrs. Scarlett can, far better than I, elaborate on what the reduced amount will do that we are proposing. So if you'd like to proceed.

Mrs. Scarlett: Thank you. As was mentioned, in the parameters we were initially looking at coming in with a status quo budget. Instead the proposed budget as it relates to this year's planning and development initiatives is being requested at \$725,000. As you will see in your detail here, that's broken down between more IT-related projects and then, in addition, the AV broadcast operations.

I want to thank you all. You all know, in terms of this year, that it's been a very interesting year not only because of the election but also the move and the continued build-out here in the Federal building. We appreciate your patience and your support, particularly on the second floor in terms of getting these rooms ready so that

you could start your committee proceedings here in September and October. That has been where a major bulk of our initiatives, staff, and efforts have been directed.

3:10

What we are looking to do both on the IT side and on the AV and the broadcast side is to finish that work because although it looks like things are done here, behind these walls there are a lot of unconnected cables, equipment, and work that still needs to proceed. But we are in our final stages, and we're really excited about that. What that means, then, specifically from the IT side here: we're still looking to finish off the additional work that's required in our data centre, that takes and supports all of the LAO operations and the operations of your constituency offices, to ensure that we've got the redundancy and connectivity between the Federal building and the Legislature and everything in between in terms of the pedway, where we have our education centre as well.

In the AV/broadcast area, again, we need to continue to build out and get functional some of the additional AV, our video conferencing capabilities. As well, there was a decision made that in the interest of continued transparency right now we are able in these four rooms to take and stream your audio of these committee proceedings, and by the end of next fiscal year we will have all the work done so that we can also video stream the proceedings here in two of the rooms. The savings, if you will, that we're representing on this page is that given the use of the rooms at this point in time we are recommending that we not proceed in this current year to take and build out the video broadcast capabilities in our third committee room or our fourth committee room. So we are deferring those to another year. What is being presented here: this will take and finish all the work that is required on this floor, complete the media room, that we are also working on right now, and give you full functionality in these rooms.

In addition, under IT there is a bullet there that is also asking for support in terms of the Legislature Library digitization project that the Speaker referenced earlier. We have a lot of old documents, historical documents related to the operation of our Legislature and the history. The Legislature Library has been working really hard at digitizing them so that they are available more readily to all Albertans and online, and that is the way that the library is progressing there. In order to take that next big step forward in terms of that project, we are targeting part of that money there, which will include buying two specialized pieces of software to use as a tool and some additional hardware for storage purposes.

The Chair: Are there any questions on the planning and development initiative page that you have before you? Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Well, at risk of going too far off topic – you can stop me if you need to; I know you will, Mr. Speaker. My question is about planning and development, truly, and I'm thinking about the Federal building. There are a couple of locations there for restaurants, for example, and I know we're at budget for the space. One would think that if you could get a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year in rent for that, that would be a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year less that the taxpayers would have to fork over to look after this beautiful building. Are there any plans to at some point move on those opportunities for revenue?

Mrs. Scarlett: Go ahead, Brian.

Mr. Hodgson: I can speak to that if I may, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Infrastructure has an RFP out. Frankly, there wasn't a huge amount of interest. Of course, that space is not within the Legislative Assembly Office domain, so we have no direct control over it. We

have some influence, I suppose, in terms of what we would like to see in the nature of that operation. I think that's really a question for the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Just the fact that there seems to me that in the budget there was – the areas it seems to me were mentioned with the gift shop and stuff like that, where they sold . . .

Mr. Hodgson: The gift shop, the Alberta Branded, falls within the LAO, but the areas that you were referring to a moment or two ago had to do with, I think, the proposed location for a restaurant, a so-called fine dining facility. You know, a prêt-à-manger, a bistro of sorts, was the other facility, and Infrastructure continues to investigate potential solutions to that space.

Mr. McIver: All right. So I need to take that up with the Infrastructure minister and not with the Speaker. You said it more politely, but I think that's – you're agreeing with that, right?

Mr. Hodgson: Thank you, I think.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Mr. Speaker, then I'll go back to the gift shop just for a minute. I understand that the way it is, it looks beautiful. Somebody's done a terrific job there, let me say that. Has there been any analysis of the change between the new and the old shop other than that it looks nicer and it's in a nicer space – I agree with that a hundred per cent – has there been any direct comparisons done between how many square feet it takes and what the revenue or profit difference is out of that space?

Just as a matter of course, clearly, it would probably be better if it generated more per square foot, but I understand it's not quite as simple as wanting it to. It's not a pure retail outlet insofar as it looks to me like there's a very strong bias, which I support, by the way, to have Alberta-made art in there as opposed to Coca-Cola, which I love very much, but a skid of Coca-Cola wouldn't be appropriate in there. I'll repeat that I love it because I don't want the Coca-Cola people to be mad at me. But the fact is that in that context I know that the only goal isn't to make money there. Nonetheless, I think it's worth taking a quick peek at some point to say: "We've got all this more space now. How's it doing?"

The Chair: I'll let Mr. Chapman and Mr. Hodgson speak to the details. Time limitations have not allowed us – we've had some very general discussions. I've been briefed on that store. It is seen, as you say, Mr. McIver, as an extension of a service to the people. The one phrase that resonates in my mind amid the discussion – and I hope we will move forward with that – is that it is one more thread in the story of reaching out to other parts of the province. It's a destination centre. I think you're going to start to see – and I think my wife may have already found it – that this is a place that when you're looking for particular Alberta products that are representative of the province, you would actually search that out. In addition to it being a service when they come to see the Magna Carta or the Group of Seven, et cetera, they see that.

Mr. Chapman, Mr. Hodgson, anything else you'd like to add?

Mr. Hodgson: Well, to your question as to the relative size, the current Alberta Branded, the gift shop that you referred to – we call it Alberta Branded – is about 2.2 times the size of the previous gift shop. We do have a business plan, and our business plan is progressing very well. The retail sales are significantly greater than they were in the other location. I guess the principle of retailing is to, you know, be where the traffic is, and obviously there's more traffic here than there was before.

The mix of sales. Predominantly, where we were before, most of our sales were to members, and that is changing. What we offer in the gift shop, as the Speaker pointed out, supports Alberta artists, craftsmen, and authors. But beyond that it amplifies our program. By way of the Magna Carta, that you mentioned, we did actually a significant volume of business on Magna Carta related items, and we would intend to continue that with the temporary exhibits that we plan, the cycle of four exhibits, basically, per year.

3:20

So I don't know if that answers your questions. I can get down into the details in terms of the sales. For comparative figures from the months of July through January in 2014 we did \$146,000. In the same period for 2015 it was up to \$265,000. So there is a significant increase, and we see that – our sales figures we project at \$390,000 for the coming year. That's a conservative estimate. The visitor services manager had to restrain me from my enthusiasm for suggesting that we could probably do better than that. But, you know, I think for budgeting purposes it sounds like a good figure. [An electronic device sounded]

Does that answer your questions?

Mr. McIver: I was looking for a flavour, and I think I just got that. I am grateful for that. It's a good space. I like what's in there. Just for the record I stroked my personal credit card there a couple of times when the Magna Carta was here.

The Chair: Glad to hear that.

Mr. McIver: We needed a souvenir of that event. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Yes, we heard you, Mr. Cooper. You're here with us.

Are there any other questions on this planning and development initiatives question?

I just want to summarize where I think we are at. I'm hearing that there is some more need for information, background, and detail, particularly with respect to the House services area and with respect to the visitor services area, and that we may or may not have some of that detailed information available. I would like to propose that we recess now for about 10 minutes if we could, see what information staff might have available for us, and then reconvene.

I would, however, before we leave – we'll come back to this, but I just want to emphasize. I intended to do this in any event, so let's talk about, as we come back, what changes, if any, you're going to be making. The summary page, which you have under your estimates summary, shows that overall the cost of Legislative Assembly operations is going to be reduced by about minus 5 per cent in the upcoming year, and any changes we make we'll incorporate into the majority vote. Is that agreeable?

So could we adjourn? I'm seeing that we'd reconvene at 25 minutes to the hour. Is that agreeable? Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 3:22 p.m. to 3:43 p.m.]

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, are you still with us?

Mr. Cooper: You bet. Go ahead.

The Chair: Ms Luff? Robyn?

Ms Luff: Hi. I'm here.

The Chair: Good.

Debbie, are you with us?

Ms Jabbour: I'm here.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just had a very brief discussion with staff, and staff can speak to the details. I'm advised that in the past the practice has been driven by the number of sessional days as outlined in the standing orders. Mr. Reynolds could maybe briefly speak to that.

I'll let you speak to that, Rob, and then I'll go to the next point.

Mr. Reynolds: Oh, dear. Well, I'm sure that this is no surprise to members. The standing order we're referring to is Standing Order 3, which sets out the hours of sitting, which were changed pursuant to Government Motion 19, agreed to on November 5, 2015, effective November 24. It sets out the sitting hours, including morning sittings. Then 3(4) talks about when the Assembly shall meet, which is:

- (a) for the Spring Sitting commencing on the second Tuesday in February and concluding no later than the first Thursday in June; and
- (b) for the Fall Sitting commencing on the last Monday of October and concluding no later than the first Thursday in December.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm also advised that – so that's been used in past years. The principle is that the numbers that go into this budget reflect and are in line with that number of sessional days. Now, I also understand that the historical record has been in actual practice – and, again, there have been very many changes. There was a significant change in 2015. There were ones in '14 as well as in '13 and earlier years. To try and establish a pattern is rather difficult, but approximately – and I stand to be corrected – the historical actuality of practice has been an average of about 50 days, which was, I think, shared with us before.

Am I correct, Shannon?

Ms Dean: Somewhere between 45 and 50 sitting days.

The Chair: Now, for simplification's sake, there are many, many details on what generates that cost, but I'm going to urge the committee to look at a higher level as to how you break that down. Approximately, the cost for an hour of the Assembly, which includes pages, *Hansard*, security – maybe there are other things that are there – is \$3,800. So the committee's decision, if you want to give a different directive to budget differently than they have in the past – the committee decides this. That is essentially what I understand.

Estefania, you have a question?

Cortes-Vargas: Yeah. I very much appreciate those details, and those are the details that we're looking for. We want them in writing, and we want to have time to review them. We're not asking to change them. We're not asking anything else other than to make sure that we're able and have the information in front of us to make informed decisions. Really, that's what we're asking for here, to have those same definitions, those same answers that you're just giving us right now but to be given time to review them, to have discussions to make sure that we're doing our job as Members' Services Committee members in economic times that, you know, are very difficult for many Albertans. We're reflecting on cuts on various levels, on stabilizing, but also we have to review that everything is meeting the needs of Albertans. Without those details we cannot make informed decisions, and we cannot make them just by numbers given in a committee very briefly.

Mr. McIver: How much of these increased costs are due to the changes in the standing orders, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Well, I'm advised that staff is about eight hours a day. If you follow past practice, it's eight hours a . . .

Ms Dean: A week.

The Chair: Excuse me. A week.

Mr. McIver: All right. So perhaps before the standing orders were changed might have been the time to maybe ask these questions. Now this is just a reflection of what was done. All right. No, I appreciate that. It tells me that the questions have been asked and answered, and I think we have enough information to make a decision here, in my humble opinion.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Okay. I'm hearing that at least some of the members of the committee would like more written detailed information prior to making a decision. Am I correct, Estefania?

Cortes-Vargas: That's correct.

The Chair: Just for the edification of the committee, and I know I mentioned this earlier, we've – Scott? We've been advised by the Treasury Board that we were to have – I'm sorry.

Estefania.

Cortes-Vargas: Absolutely. Just wanting to comment on that. You know, we have discussed it with Treasury Board, and they're completely fine if it takes us time to make sure that we're making the correct decisions for all Albertans. If that means March 1, that is all right. So in regard to your question here about the February 29 deadline, I mean, we're looking at these budgets, and we're approving these budgets right now. This is the correct time to review that the budgets are meeting the expectations of all Albertans, that we are able as committee members to fulfill fiduciary duties. I would say that I would need information before I can make that decision, and by that – I normally expect to see actual numbers in budgets.

You know, I compare this to the last two days of Legislative Offices, where I sat reviewing the budgets of the Auditor General, the Child and Youth Advocate, who worked extremely hard to make sure that they're meeting their mandate without asking for any additional money. So when I see that – and those ones also reflected that – I want to make sure that the vote that I'm doing here is done with comparable budgets. Again, answering the previous question, if it's going to take us longer, that's all right.

3:50

Mr. Nielsen: I guess, given the discussion, Mr. Speaker, would this be the appropriate time now to present that motion?

The Chair: I would wait just a moment, if you would.

I want just to make sure. I'm hearing that the information provided to our staff by the Treasury Board is different from what we – it's some new information you have, that March 1 would be acceptable. Is that correct? Our staff have not heard that. Am I correct? On the written record we would have something there by the 29th.

Is that correct, Scott?

Mr. S. Ellis: That's what we've been asked. I think that, you know, the same word went out to the Legislature officers in their budgets, and they've completed theirs and are forwarding them on now. We

need a couple of days to prepare our information to send to them, and then they've advised us that what they have to do is then to consolidate all the departments and our information as well and go to print with it in time for it to be presented in the House and that there's a time period that that takes. However, that's what we've been told. I can't comment on anything else.

The Chair: Right. Okay. We've been advised that it's some new information that maybe we have not been apprised of.

Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Actually, I'm a little bit confused, Mr. Speaker, what the process is here that we're doing. Are we attempting to talk about a motion right now or the idea of bringing forward one?

The Chair: I'm hearing from Estefania that some of the members would like to have more detailed, hard-copy information to support the details as proposed in this budget.

Is that correct, Estefania?

Cortes-Vargas: That's correct. I know my members would be very happy to clear up exactly what we're looking for.

The Chair: Okay. Before I recognize you, maybe it is time to test a motion in that regard. Then we will know what we're dealing with.

Mr. Nielsen, you have a proposal?

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move that the LAO House services branch budget be broken down with comparable actual costs from 2014-2015 as well as the exact breakdown of the increased costs they are proposing and an updated version be presented to the committee at the next meeting. I do have copies.

The Chair: Okay. The next meeting: is it understood? It's not in your motion. Would that be March 1?

Mr. Nielsen: Correct.

The Chair: You have copies to distribute? Would it be agreeable that the narrative be used to add in March 1 if it's not in the motion?

Mr. Nielsen: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. Let's have that distributed.

To Robyn and Nathan and Debbie: there is a motion being proposed – the hard copy is being distributed – that I would read. Mr. Nielsen has moved that the LAO House services branch budget be broken down with comparable actual costs from 2014-15 as well as the exact breakdown of the increased costs they are proposing and an updated version be presented to the committee at the next meeting. And I add in, understood: March 1, 2016.

Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm inclined to vote against this motion. I have a couple of concerns. The first: I would be curious when I'm done making some remarks if I could get some indication on if there are any costs associated with postponing this and having to bring everybody back together to do it.

Putting that aside, again, I feel like we're getting into the realm of a waste of many people's time. I also think we're starting to call into question some very professional people and people that are probably a lot more capable with this information than I am. I feel like some questions were asked. The explanation was provided now in writing as well as verbally. I understand the government caucus is feeling frustrated. They would have liked that earlier. You know,

one day, maybe when they're in opposition, they'll get to see what that's like when the budget is happening.

You know, the explanation has been brought forward. There was a change to the standing orders. As Ms Dean has indicated – and I agree with her – it's not the LAO's job to pass judgment on those changes. That's what the Assembly decided. They are to provide us with some information on what the consequences or the costs associated with that change are. They've done that. There's a cost associated with that change. Many people around this table have differing views on whether or not we should have changed the standing orders, but I would argue that that's not this committee's role right now. Our job is to approve the budget for the LAO so that they can proceed.

I'm confused. What new information are we requesting that would require us to postpone this decision?

I've also heard from some of the government caucus members that in the future they will be lowering the hours that we work in the evening. Now, Mr. Speaker, I've heard that before. Nevertheless, none of us around this table has control over whether the government keeps us here at night or not. That's up to, you know, the government leadership and not something that the LAO could take as solid information to adjust the budget.

So from my perspective – and I think many of my colleagues around the table will agree with me – it's time for us to make a decision, and I have the information that I need to be able to make that decision.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I guess, first off, I want to be very, very clear. I'm certainly not calling into question the capabilities of the LAO. They are incredibly capable. I'm very grateful for the services that they provide. But unless they're prepared to start coming out and meeting with each and every one of my constituents when they ask me, "Where is this money being spent?" I wouldn't mind a few details.

Mr. McIver: Well, how fortunate that I get to speak after the last speaker. I think that what the real lesson here for the government is is that maybe you should go out and talk to your constituents before you change things like the standing orders and ask them how much they want to pay rather than doing something without knowing what it's going to cost and then starting to ask questions and blame the LAO afterwards for something that they did without actually doing their homework up front. This is something that we in the PC Party have been saying to the government since day one. We know that they're new, but it's getting on to be a year now.

Here are two words for you that you might want to remember: unintended consequences. When you do things without doing your homework up front, sometimes you get – wait for it – unintended consequences, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's what we're dealing with here. Waiting to get details on the unintended consequences doesn't change the fact that the decision was made by the government without doing their homework up front. That is why they don't have the information here today.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. To reiterate what's been said, it was asked or more information was required so that we can make correct decisions. In my opinion, we have all the information in front of us that is necessary to make a correct decision. These are estimates on the operations of House services based on standing orders that have been put in place. Correct decisions on standing orders will allow us to move ahead in way

that maybe the government wants to. This is a lesson on: decisions have consequences. We need to recognize that the LAO is only putting in front of us an estimate of what it's going to cost us to implement the standing orders that are before us.

The Chair: I might put "be incurred."

Mr. Nixon: I don't want to belabour the point, Mr. Speaker, but I do think that if the government members who are bringing forward this motion are looking for support for it, they should explain what other information they're looking for, that would want to derail this decision and the process that the LAO has to do.

The LAO has argued and made very clear that they have a tight timeline here and they want to get to work, and I agree with them on that. What new information would change our decision, and what possible reason would we have to delay to review it?

4:00

The Chair: I'm advised by staff that some of this detailed information is available. My sense, though, from how I've understood the motion is that the mover would like to take that away from here and consider it in greater detail even though we may have it here today. Is that correct, Mr. Nielsen?

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. To try and make a decision by quickly glazing over – I'd at least like a little time.

The Chair: Before we call for the motion, staff do have the information available. With the indulgence of the committee could we pass that around? We would then call for the motion after that. Is that agreeable?

I'll just give everybody a chance to take a look at that, and then I'll ask Ms Dean to elaborate or speak to it.

Ms Dean: Mr. Speaker, if I may, the bulk of the increase in House services relates to additional sessional hours resulting from the amendments to Standing Order 3. Broken down, the security costs are in the neighbourhood of \$280,000, the Sergeant-at-Arms has had to hire eight additional pages for the cost of \$17,000; there's overtime in his area of \$22,000; *Hansard* wage costs are estimated to go up by \$163,000; and broadcasting labour costs are estimated to go up \$52,000. In terms of FTE changes there are approximately three FTE changes here.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague the Sergeant to supplement.

Mr. Hodgson: The reason for the increase in the number of pages . . .

The Chair: Hold on, Brian, we're just distributing documents. We need to send the document to members who are long distance on the phone.

While we're doing that, Ms Dean, can you just tell me – this seems to be the crux of the argument – that historically it's 5.3 hours per session day, but given that the sessional days have changed, it's projected that it could go to 8.7. Do I understand that correctly?

Ms Dean: That's based on the fall sitting average hours versus the June sitting average hours.

I believe Mr. Ellis might have some supplementary information that was requested with respect to 2014-15.

Mr. S. Ellis: I have the overall budget figures for '14-15 from the financial statements. The actual House services expenditures in 2014-15 were \$5,929,000. Now, as the Acting Clerk Shannon Dean mentioned, those were under a different set of assumptions in terms

of the time and number of days in session and in terms of the hours. However, those were the costs that were incurred at that time, and those are total dollars in the House services budget for that particular year.

The Chair: We're sending this material to you as we speak.

Ms Luff: Thank you. Just via e-mail? Oh, here it is. Okay. I got it. Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Point of clarification. Those were the actual numbers spent, or was that budgeted numbers?

Mr. S. Ellis: Actual.

The Chair: Has everybody – just tell me when you've got them out there.

Ms Quast: It has gone to the committee members. I was just confirming with them that they could read it in the format I sent it.

Ms Luff: Yes. It's a photo, but I can read it fine.

Mr. Cooper: I'm good.

The Chair: There's a motion before us. You've received the written information that is available today. I'm sensing that you'd still like to discuss this in greater detail between now and March 1. That's my understanding. I'd just get Allison to read the motion one time, and then we'll move on.

Ms Quast: Moved by Mr. Nielsen that the LAO House services branch budget be broken down with comparable actual costs from 2014-2015 as well as the exact breakdown of the increased costs they are proposing and an updated version be presented to the committee at the March 1, 2016, meeting.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all in favour, please say aye. All opposed, say no. Has there been a request for a recorded vote?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Let's mark these down.

The Chair: Those in favour, please indicate for the record your name.

Cortes-Vargas: Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Yes, in support.

Mr. Nielsen: Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore. Yes.

Mr. Piquette: Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Yes.

Mrs. Schreiner: Kim Schreiner, MLA, Red Deer-North. Yes.

Mr. Malkinson: Brian Malkinson, Calgary-Currie, substituting for Stephanie McLean. Voting yes.

The Chair: Robyn Luff, are you in favour?

Ms Luff: Robyn Luff, MLA, Calgary-East. Yes, in favour.

The Chair: Those opposed?

Mr. McIver: I'm opposed, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Nixon: Opposed.

Mr. van Dijken: Opposed.

Mr. Cooper: Opposed.

The Chair: The motion has carried. I got everybody.

I'll be consulting with LAO staff and probably with those individuals who requested additional information, and we will make best efforts to get as much detail as we can back to you as soon as possible.

The meeting on the 1st is at what time? Does someone remember that? Is it 1 o'clock?

Ms Quast: One o'clock.

The Chair: From 1 o'clock until 5 o'clock on March 1.

The next agenda item has to deal with the matter that came out of our last meeting, the appointment of a subcommittee on family friendly . . .

Mr. Piquette: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to make a motion specific to visitor services.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I thought this was on the list. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Piquette: That's okay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues and I are not convinced that the case has been made adequately for the increase in the visitor services budget. We think that they could go back, and with some creative methods we can kind of hold the line on where we were previously, and this is in light of the difficult circumstances that we face.

I do have a motion here. I'd like to move that the LAO branch budget for visitor services be revised and presented at the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, March 1, maintaining the 2015-2016 fiscal year's budget, or in the amount of \$8,305,000.

Sir, I have copies of the motion.

4:10

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Chair, I'll speak to the motion when appropriate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hodgson: Mr. Chairman, I think the one that the hon. member is referring to is the House services budget, not the visitor services budget.

Mr. Piquette: Oh. Yeah. My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, there was an error made in transposing, so I would like to amend the motion on the floor to \$2,342,000. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry; \$2,715,000. I think that would be the accurate one there, right? [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry; it is \$2,342,000.

Mr. Cooper: I'm sorry. Don't we have to defeat the first motion?

Mr. Piquette: It's \$2,342,000.

The Chair: Just bear with me. I'm just making sure for clarity that we're all on the same page here. Patience.

We'll just recess for a minute informally.

Mr. Piquette: My apologies. Are we reconvened?

The Chair: Yes. Can we just get some clarification if there are some errors made on the numbers that you're proposing?

Mr. Piquette: Yes. I'd like to amend the motion on the floor to \$2,718,000 instead of \$8,305,000, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I'll just read it for the sake of all present as well as those on the phone. MLA Piquette to move that the LAO branch budget for visitor services be revised and presented at the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, maintaining the 2015-16 fiscal year budget, or in the amount of \$2,718,000.

Am I correct, Mr. Piquette?

Mr. Piquette: I certainly hope so, Mr. Speaker. Yes, that's correct.

Mr. van Dijken: Just for clarification, is this essentially to match the expenditure line, or is this to be proposed as net expenditure?

Mr. Piquette: This is meant to match – no, it's not net; it's total expenditure, including revenue.

An Hon. Member: No. It's gross expenditure.

Mr. Piquette: Gross expenditure. Yeah. Well, that's including revenue.

Mr. van Dijken: Just for a clarification, I would suggest that the motion should read: LAO branch budget expenditures for visitor services be revised.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Maybe for clarity, then, I could rephrase it to reflect 2015-16 estimates and a zero per cent increase.

The Chair: Before we introduce the motion again, could we get some clarity on what the motion is on the table?

I'm prepared to give you some time if you need that. Do you intend it to be a gross expenditure or a net cost? Total expenditure not to exceed . . .

Mr. Piquette: Yes. That's correct.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken was suggesting slightly different wording, and it seemed like you were agreeing with each other.

Is that correct, Glenn?

Mr. van Dijken: Exactly. I'm just trying to bring some clarity to the motion, to reflect that it's a branch budget's total expenditures, to match the number that was presented. I believe that brings better clarity to what the target is here.

The Chair: As it currently exists: Mr. Piquette moved that the LAO branch budget for visitor services be revised and presented at the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, maintaining the 2015-16 fiscal year budget in the amount of \$2,718,000.

Again, a friendly suggestion. Maybe it's the narrative that's confusing me. Maintaining? Do you intend to say: in the '16-17 fiscal year's budget?

Cortes-Vargas: Sorry. I think we understand each other. The part he's asking is just to identify that the number we are using is the total expenditure line.

The Chair: Gross expenditures? Voted expenditures?

Cortes-Vargas: I'm using the words that are reflected in the budget just so we can all refer back to the same line when we come back here. We're talking to the total expenditure on page 1 of tab 5. At 2015-2016 it says that the total expenditure was \$2,718,000, and if we can reflect that motion.

4:20

The Chair: Understood.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I might want to speak on this motion once we figure out what the motion says. With that said, I have to suggest to this committee that this is starting to look a little bit chaotic. I'm a bit concerned that we're picking numbers that could have significant consequences in going with a firm, solid number.

From my perspective, my view right now, the government caucus members bringing it forward don't even seem to understand that number or what it might mean. I would suggest that that could cause significant difficulty for the LAO to try to fit into that solid number. Given that the government caucus members clearly do not even understand the number that they're trying to bring forward or their motion, I think we should slow this down. That's my recommendation to the committee.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I would like to be on the list again.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is amazing. It's hard to say this with a straight face. The government members are suggesting that we change a very big number at the bottom of a long column of numbers, recognizing that that number in itself doesn't mean anything. I mean, it means dollars, which is very important, but it is the sum of the numbers above it. The members from the government side haven't said which of the numbers above it they intend to change.

For example, Mr. Speaker – it's hard for me not to be sarcastic because this is just, in my view, so bad that it's unbelievable – who's getting fired for the \$276,000 that's coming out of earnings? Who's getting their travel cut? That's easy. Who's getting \$8,000 more in travel? That's an interesting question. Postage: I think that's not the biggest deal to the taxpayers at home. The dollars are, but if we mail more or less a little bit – then there is \$96,000 in other labour and services. I didn't hear the government members ask what is entailed in that other labour and services and what, for example, will be – here are those words again – the unintended consequences should you reduce that labour and services. The administration office supplies: I guess people can hold onto their pencil a little longer before they turn it in for a new one.

Mr. Speaker, amongst other things – again, back where I started – there's \$276,000 in earnings. Maybe we can do without those \$276,000 in earnings, but where I come from, I think it would be prudent to ask: who's getting fired, what work isn't going to get done, and what will be the effect on Alberta? None of this seems to have been considered in the rush to change a bottom-line number to something that looks more palatable to the government members, when it appears that they haven't expressed, at least from what I've heard, a lick of thought for those columns of numbers that go up above it.

So until I hear a big improvement in the thought process that goes into this, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that any of us, including the government members, should support this because by voting for it without those other questions asked and answered, I frankly think, it's embarrassing.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. I just have two questions. I'll ask them both, and then hopefully the individuals can respond. You know, I think that making cuts to budgets during this time can be a very positive path forward. I think that overall we've seen a reduction in the LAO's budget, and that was a good step in the right direction. So I'll premise my comments with that.

First, to Mr. Piquette: what is the exact amount of the change from your motion to the budget that was presented by the LAO?

Then my second question will be to the Sergeant-at-Arms or perhaps AI, if he could give us a bit of a sense of what projects, what things around the Assembly will need to be cut in order to make this happen. What are the dates, you know, the front-line workers that might have to be laid off because of this?

Then I may have a follow-up after if we can hear from Mr. Piquette and then the LAO on it.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. To be clear, the intent of this was to hold the line on cost. I mean, there should be no significant layoffs. We're not talking about a 15 per cent cut in the budget for visitor services, Mr. Cooper; we're talking about holding the line at the expenditures for the 2015-2016 year. I apologize if the motion made that unclear, but that was the intent. We are looking at zero increases across the board generally in other organizations, and we think that we have significant resources in order to be able to accommodate visitors without increasing the expenditures, considering the times that we're in. I want to be very clear. We are not talking about a 15 per cent decrease; we are talking about holding the line at zero per cent.

Does that answer your question, sir?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. That's helpful.

The \$400,000, or whatever it was: if you didn't receive that, Mr. Hodgson, what effect would that have?

The Chair: I'd like, Mr. Cooper, to just interject for a second. I'm rather hesitant to expect staff in such a short period of time to, you know, determine in clear terms what the impact is going to be. I think that's difficult for them to answer in any kind of a reasonable way. I would much prefer – it looks like, on the basis of an earlier motion, there's going to be a meeting next week. I would think that it might be better to give staff the opportunity to make more clear what that impact might be. So that would be my position on it.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Cooper, we are discussing getting this information, you know. As we've discussed, if there are more details provided, it would be very clear to us what those effects would be, and that's what we're asking for for the next meeting, to discuss these, to look at these.

Mr. Cooper: No. With all due respect, that's not what the motion says. The motion says: change the budget line, and come back to us. What you're asking us to vote on today is a change in the budget line, not for more information, like your first motion included, not a justification of: why the extra money? What you're asking us to vote on right now is to change the budget line, and while I may be in support of that – you're right – we don't necessarily have the information. So the question you've asked is not: provide us with information, and then we'll make a recommendation. The question you asked was: put this number in the budget line.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Essentially the motion is tying the hands of the visitor services office in the programming that they will be able to deliver and the extent that they will be able to deliver it. If that's the intent of the motion, is it clear that the government recognizes that by sending people back to fit a number, they need to be comfortable with the changes that will be a consequence of trying to fit within that number?

For example, we have a new education centre that's preparing to be opened in May of 2016. The budget would reflect the opening of that facility. Does that mean we do not open it? We have increased responsibilities with guest services in the three areas that are open to this day.

I guess my question is: is the mover comfortable with the staff coming back with a reduction in programming to meet the number that is being proposed?

4:30

Mr. Piquette: With all due respect, I mean, this is something that I think we'll determine on March 1, when we get the revised budget to meet that target. You know, this is something that we can look at with that information on March 1, assuming the motion is passed.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, with all due respect, that's not what the motion says. To Mr. Cooper's point, we're being asked now to vote on a motion which is moved and on the floor – let's be clear on that; we're going to have to make a decision on it – to not ask for more information, to not instruct for a reduction, or that we would like to see other options and the consequences of that. What we've done is that this motion will instruct the department to reduce to a certain cost.

Now, first of all, I used to be CFO of a pipeline company, which did not see nearly as much oversight of finances as Mr. Ellis did, but I can tell you that this is not how we would budget. I don't think that it's how anybody would. So my comments aren't on whether I think there should be a reduction; it's that this process is not the right way to do it. I think there could be a lot of unintended consequences from it. I really think we should vote this motion down now that it's on the table, and if you want more information or to go a different way, then we should go that route, particularly because we are going to be meeting again next week.

I also have to point out the irony that we stopped moving on the other items because the government caucus members wanted more information but now are asking your colleagues to vote on a motion that we would have no clue what the consequences are or what the end result of that motion would be only a few minutes later, after you made the argument that you didn't have enough information.

So I strongly urge everybody around the table to vote this motion down.

The Chair: Allison, could you please read the motion before the table?

Ms Quast: Mr. Piquette moves that the LAO branch budget for visitor services be revised and presented at the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services . . .

Mr. Piquette: Excuse me.

The Chair: Just a sec.

Mr. Piquette: We are open to amending the motion. Actually, this is something where we should make sure we get this wording right.

The Chair: Is the table prepared . . .

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Yeah. We'd be open to amending it – and I guess we've got to make sure we get the correct wording – to getting information on the impact to visitor services of a zero per cent increase for 2016-2017.

The Chair: Thank you. Just give me, the Chair, an opportunity to consult with counsel here. So you're now suggesting that you'd like to revise the original motion. Is that right?

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, just not – we could defeat that motion and have a new motion.

The Chair: Yeah. That's where I was going, Mr. Cooper.

Would it be inappropriate for you to withdraw the motion and put a revised motion forward? Would you be prepared to do that, Mr. Piquette?

Mr. Piquette: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. McIver: Do we need to vote on withdrawing?

The Chair: I don't know. I'm going to seek counsel.

Ms Dean: Seek the consent of the committee.

The Chair: You need consent, unanimous?

Ms Dean: Yes.

The Chair: Unanimous consent.

You need unanimous consent to withdraw the motion. Is that here?

Mr. Cooper: Well, just before you ask that question, sir . . .

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Cooper: . . . how would that be different than defeating the motion and having a new motion introduced? Can I hear counsel's opinion on that?

The Chair: Counsel has been asked for an opinion on that.

Mr. Reynolds: Well, it's a different question. Withdrawing the motion would prevent an objection later on that you're proposing a motion on the same topic, if one were to object that way.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, okay.

The Chair: So the guidance of counsel is to withdraw or to defeat?

Mr. Reynolds: Well, one, it's not up to us as to what the committee would do in its wisdom, but if one were to introduce a different motion, one might want to withdraw the motion that's on the floor and propose a new one.

The Chair: I'm told that we need unanimous consent to withdraw, which you may or may not get. Would you like to test that, Mr. Piquette? Would you like to test the motion on the withdrawal?

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. Let's see if we can get unanimous consent.

The Chair: All those in favour of supporting the motion to withdraw Mr. Piquette's motion? Is that the correct call?

Ms Dean: Consent to withdraw.

The Chair: Consent to withdraw? All in favour, say aye. Are there any opposed, say no.

Mr. McIver: I'm opposed. I don't think we need to withdraw it; I think we need to kill it.

The Chair: So the original motion stays on the table. Is that correct?

One more time we'll read the motion because I saw Mr. Piquette – when it was being read, it was slightly different. Is that right?

Mr. Piquette: What is the motion that you have there?

Ms Quast: Moved by Mr. Piquette that the LAO branch budget for visitor services be revised and presented at the next meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, maintaining the 2015-16 fiscal year's budget, or in the amount of \$2,718,000.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, say no. The motion is defeated.

Is there another motion to bring before the committee with respect to the visitor services budget? Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, I can maybe get some help fine tuning the language here based on what I'm reading. Moved that the LAO branch budget for visitor services be revised and presented at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Members' Services on March 1, 2016, to maintain current . . .

Mr. Reynolds: That's the same motion.

Mr. Nielsen: That's why I'm asking for help.

Mr. Reynolds: If your intention is to have the LAO come back with the same amount that you indicated previously, I mean, then that's the same as the motion that was just defeated. If your intention, which is what I understood from Mr. Piquette, was that the LAO present more information with respect to the increase so that the committee can make a decision, much like your motion, Mr. Nielsen, with respect to House services, then I imagine that motion would be in order, in my respectful submission. But, once again, I can't judge your intent because it's up to you.

The Chair: In effect, I'm going to assist if I can, Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Please, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I think that, based on the observation that Mr. Reynolds made, your intention is that you would like more information that would allow you – I'm going to test this a little bit – to support maintaining expenditures at their 2015-16 level.

Mr. Piquette: Maybe I could, just very briefly here – I think that when the original motion was proposed, I mean, the idea was that we're not actually approving the budget now because the first motion passed until March 1. The idea was that, you know, if there were seriously negative impacts, we were not actually doing anything that's irrevocable at this time.

Now, because of concerns of the other members, we've withdrawn – well, we tried to withdraw that motion. We had to kill it. So now we're trying to frame this in a way that – you know, we're still after a zero per cent increase, but we're allowing some space for, as Mr. McIver was talking about, unintended consequences. This is something that we could presume was originally part of it, because we're not actually approving the budget until March 1, but this is for clarity's sake.

I'm not sure if that would help, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Chair: I'll just recognize Estefania.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. I move that the LAO branch visitor services budget be broken down with comparable actual costs from 2014-2015 as well as the exact breakdown of the increased costs they are proposing and an updated version be presented to the committee next meeting.

The Chair: It's pretty specific. Is it the wish at the table that we circulate a copy of that? If so, that might take a minute.

Mr. McIver: It doesn't say it in the motion, but would the LAO automatically, if this was carried, bring back a set of consequences with those potential changes so that we wouldn't have any unintended consequences when the committee considers it at a future meeting?

Mr. Hodgson: We could certainly do that.

Mr. McIver: It just would seem perfectly sensible to me to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Okay. The mover could add that to the motion, or we could just do it. I think we will simply do it.

Cortes-Vargas: Let's just go with that.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. I'm going to test the indulgence of the committee at this hour. Could we have Allison read the motion rather than distribute hard copies if that's agreeable?

Seeing agreement around the table, Allison.

Ms Quast: Member Cortes-Vargas to move that the LAO branch visitor services budget be broken down with comparable costs from 2014-15 as well as the exact breakdown of the increased costs they are proposing and an updated version be presented to the committee at the March 1, 2016, meeting.

The Chair: It sounds fairly clear to me this time.

You had a question, Mr. van Dijken?

Mr. van Dijken: I'm trying to get my head around why we're looking for actual numbers from 2014-2015 to actually figure out how we're going to be operating a completely different operation for 2016-2017. That would be my concern. The numbers are fairly irrelevant. I'm not going to say "totally irrelevant" but of limited value.

The Chair: No comment.

Mr. Nixon: Just to quickly clarify, I think my colleague meant that the numbers for the previous year are irrelevant to the decision because it's a new facility, which I think has been articulated very well in the documents and the presentation. Having said that, though, I think that in the interest of time we should move forward. We can get some information on what programs essentially would have to be shut in order to accommodate that number, and then we can make a decision on March 1. So let's have the question.

The Chair: Maybe that's my reasoning, you know, when the question was asked about time. I think we need some due diligence and time as to what's being positive or negative, some of it might have to do with timing, et cetera.

There's a motion on the table. Are there any more questions with respect to the motion?

All in favour, please say aye. Are there any from our telephone guests? Do I hear "aye"?

Mr. Cooper: Aye.

The Chair: Robyn, have you left the meeting?

Ms Luff: No. I'm still here. Sorry. Aye.

The Chair: Is there anyone opposed? Hearing none, the motion has passed.

The original intention of this was to go to the summary page of the budget. My sense from the discussion around the table and the

two motions that have passed here today is that we would defer that motion until the 1st. Is that agreeable?

Mr. McIver: Would you like a motion to that effect?

The Chair: If it's helpful to this meeting.

Mr. McIver: If you think it's helpful, I will make that motion right now.

The Chair: I'm sensing consensus, so I don't think we need a motion on it. The notes will just say that the budget approval – well, I think our friends in Treasury Board would want us not to move past March 1, so we will be required, I think, to make that motion. So the meeting notes will reflect that we are in fact dealing with the motion then.

The appointment of the subcommittee on family-friendly workplace policies and practices: who would like to speak to this motion?

Cortes-Vargas: Before I speak, Mr. McIver, I believe you had a question that needed to be asked.

Mr. McIver: If we appoint a member to that committee, is it allowable within the procedures that the LAO is subject to, votes and all that stuff, to at a future date change members that are assigned to that committee?

The Chair: Sorry. I wasn't listening. I missed your point, Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: I'll start again, if I may.

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. McIver: If we appoint a member to that committee and change our minds in the next couple of weeks, can we resubmit a different member's name to put them on the committee instead of whatever one we appoint today?

The Chair: I don't know. We'll want counsel's advice. It's a subcommittee. Power for alternatives?

Mr. McIver: We're not looking for a second seat or anything like that.

The Chair: No. I understand.

Mr. Nixon: I don't see too much of a concern with that. I think it would actually probably help the government because I know they're going to be making probably some adjustments to their committees at some point. So, I mean, I don't think that I have a concern with that, but maybe Parliamentary Counsel has a reason for why we can't do it.

Ms Dean: The only issue is: with respect to the substituted member, if that member is not a member of this committee, then they can't technically be part of a subcommittee to this committee.

Mr. McIver: Thank you for that clarification. I thank Member Cortes-Vargas for raising the question on my behalf.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just would actually like to ask Mr. McIver: then would that mean that I should add you as . . .

Mr. McIver: Yes, please.

Cortes-Vargas: All right.

Having that clarity, I actually want to move this over to Mrs. Schreiner.

The Chair: Mrs. Schreiner.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the most part I think we can all agree that there needs to be some considerable changes made to the culture of the Legislature in order to make it more family friendly, and I'm glad that our government has taken leadership and has brought forward several initiatives to further this goal. At our last meeting we agreed that a subcommittee made up of members of this committee would be struck to further discuss recommendations and proposals to make our Legislature family friendly. We need to ensure that this subcommittee can get down to work as soon as possible. The House is set to reconvene in two weeks' time, and with that there will be some initial work that will need to be done to prepare for this new reality.

The mandate of this committee will be tasked with the longer term goals and discussion related to making our Legislature more family friendly. Part of this long-term strategy for this subcommittee would be to sit down with members who are expecting or have young children and discuss how best we can accommodate their needs. Is a complete renovation needed? Not likely. But there are some very concrete changes and practices that we can put into place, and these parents would be an excellent resource for this committee to lean on in order to guide their own discussions.

Mr. Speaker, I have a motion reflecting that agreement, and I will read it now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Schreiner: I move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services establish a subcommittee on family-friendly workplace practices and policies in accordance with the motion passed at the committee's February 9, 2016, meeting consisting of the following members – chair would be Robyn Luff; Colin Piquette; Nathan Cooper; Ric McIver; and myself, Kim Schreiner – and that the subcommittee report back to the committee when it has completed its work.

Thank you.

4:50

The Chair: Having heard the motion, are there any questions or observations the committee has?

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I'll speak briefly.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: I would like to thank the member opposite for the motion. I think that it is in the spirit of the previous motion, which was to strike the subcommittee. It encompasses all that we were hoping for. I think it's great when we can find items like this that can make the Assembly better for all and have some agreement on. So I and I would guess members of our caucus will be in full support of this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other questions or comments? I would just like to add for the information of the committee that the committee can be consulted on this matter. I think it's indirectly addressed in the motion, but we may need to look at some alternatives for the immediate and then longer term plans, always keeping in mind the

costs that these kinds of changes might have. Staff will be available to work with your committee to come back with this direction.

All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Anyone opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

Are there any other matters that need to be brought to committee today?

As I commented earlier about the temporary residence allowance, I will make my best efforts to work with staff to have at least a draft report back on that topic.

The next meeting will be in this room at 1 o'clock on March 1, 2016, from 1 till 5.

Do I have a motion to adjourn this meeting?

Mr. Cooper: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I already had Mr. Nielsen here.

Mr. Cooper: That's fine.

The Chair: That's what happens when you leave the meeting.

All in favour, say aye. Thank you. All opposed, say no. I don't hear any. Thanks very much. Have a good day, folks. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 4:53 p.m.]

