



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature  
Second Session

Special Standing Committee  
on  
Members' Services

Friday, November 25, 2016  
9:02 a.m.

Transcript No. 29-2-3

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 29th Legislature  
Second Session**

**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Chair  
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND), Deputy Chair

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)  
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)  
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)\*  
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND)  
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)  
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)  
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)  
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)  
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)\*\*

\* substitution for Kim Schreiner

\*\* substitution for Derek Fildebrandt

**Support Staff**

Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Clerk
Jessica Dion	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Alex McCuaig	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Brian G. Hodgson	Sergeant-at-Arms
Cheryl Scarlett	Director of Human Resources, Information Technology and Broadcast Services
Scott Ellis	Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

**Participant**

Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance

Mark Day, Executive Director, Risk Management and Insurance



**9:02 a.m. Friday, November 25, 2016**

[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good morning. I would like to call the meeting to order.

Before we get started on our business, I'd ask that members at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then I'll call on the members who are on teleconference.

**Ms Fitzpatrick:** Maria Fitzpatrick, MLA, Lethbridge-East, substituting for Kim Schreiner.

**Ms Jabbour:** Debbie Jabbour, MLA, Peace River.

**Mr. Dang:** Thomas Dang, MLA, Edmonton-South West.

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

**The Chair:** I'm Robert Wanner, MLA for Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Yao:** Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**The Chair:** To the other members who are on the phone with us: would you identify yourselves?

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

**Mr. Cooper:** Nathan Cooper from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

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

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

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, everyone.

The meeting agenda and the documents were posted last week to the committee's internal website. If anyone requires copies of these documents, please let the committee clerk know.

Before we move to business, a few operational issues. The consoles are operated by *Hansard* staff. Please keep your mobiles off and on silent and not on the table. Audio of committee meetings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

On behalf of all the members I'd simply yet again thank the staff who support these committees and the Assembly on an ongoing basis. There are so many staff that we simply don't get to know or they're behind the lines doing all of the work. On behalf of all of you I'd like to express my appreciation.

You have the agenda. Are there any additions or changes? If there are not, would a member move the adoption for meeting purposes? The Member for Lethbridge-East. All in favour? On the phones, in favour or against, please? Nathan, you haven't fallen asleep, have you? Hello? It looks like the motion passed.

You have the minutes from October 25, 2016. Are there any errors or omissions to note? If not, would a member move approval of the minutes? Member Estefania Cortes-Vargas has moved. All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Members on the telephone? Are there any individuals opposed? Hearing none, the minutes are approved.

Now, we do have some outstanding business, risk management and enhanced coverage for members. You will remember that at our September 26 meeting we had a presentation concerning risk

management and insurance, on up-to-date coverage provided under the plan. Members should have copies of both the existing risk management and insurance document as well as the document identifying proposed enhanced coverage under the plan.

I would like to welcome Mr. Mark Day, executive director of risk management and insurance. Mr. Day would like to address the committee.

Do you have any comments to make, Mr. Clerk, as an introduction?

**Mr. Reynolds:** Just briefly, Mr. Chair. Mr. Day is here. This is partially at my request. I mean, essentially, Mr. Day is going to talk about – sorry, not to give away the twist ending here, but spoiler alert – enhanced coverages for members at no additional costs. Generally speaking, one might wonder why this is coming here and why we just don't do it. It's because it's my own view that coverage for members should be very open and transparent and that members should know what it is that they're being covered for. That's part of the reason why Mr. Day is here today.

That's it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Day, welcome. Please proceed.

**Mr. Day:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since meeting with the committee on September 26, our office has been working with staff at the Legislative Assembly Office and Alberta Justice to develop a proposed new schedule of liability coverage for members. This new schedule was distributed to the committee members prior to this meeting, and I'm happy to answer some questions about what we've proposed.

Before that, however, some background information might be helpful. The current schedule sets out liability coverage that members have for situations where a member may be named as a defendant in a lawsuit. Should this happen and the member wish to use the coverage provided under the schedule, we will work with the member in managing the claim and providing a defence on behalf of the member. The scope of coverage has not changed in many years and provides protection against liability claims where persons have been injured, property has been damaged, or where there are allegations of defamation.

[Mr. McIver joined the teleconference]

**The Chair:** Mr. McIver, the meeting has started. We're currently in the process of having a presentation by Mr. Day.

Please proceed, Mr. Day.

**Mr. Day:** We've identified some gaps in coverage where our office would not be able to defend claims, and the proposed new schedule will eliminate these gaps. The proposed schedule will also bring coverage in line with coverage provided to ministers, legislative officers, and other senior officials of government. We believe these enhancements to the scope of coverage will provide better protection to the members and allow our office to respond quickly when allegations arise. As Mr. Reynolds has said, there will not be any additional charge for this coverage.

In the document provided to you, I've highlighted the areas where coverage has been changed, and I would like to point out in particular section 5 as this sets out areas where coverage has been enhanced significantly from the previous schedule. These are the same coverage provisions as are provided to other senior officials of government.

**9:10**

As far as the process, if the Members' Services Committee decides to proceed with the new schedule, the next step would be

for Treasury Board and Finance to recommend to the Treasury Board that the approved schedule be adopted. This recommendation would include the approval by the Members' Services Committee. This would then be added to the agenda of an upcoming Treasury Board meeting for their consideration.

At this point I'd be happy to answer any questions members may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Day.

Hon. members, are there any questions with respect to the documents received or the comments that Mr. Day has made? Members on the telephone?

Is there someone who's prepared to move that the recommendation be made to the President of Treasury Board and Finance on this matter? Member Estefanía Cortes-Vargas. There's a proposed draft of a motion that you could read into the record.

**Cortes-Vargas:** I move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services recommend to the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance that Treasury Board regulation 02/2009 be amended to incorporate the enhanced coverage for Members of the Legislative Assembly as circulated to the committee.

**The Chair:** Are there any questions or comments on the motion? On the phones?

All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Members on the phone? Anyone opposed? Hearing none, the motion is carried. Thank you, members.

Thanks very much, Mr. Day. I appreciate it very much.

**Mr. Day:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We would now move to the agenda's budget parameters issue, I believe. Allow me to just add some opening comments, and then the Clerk and his staff can speak to the details of the matter. Members will recall that last year, when we went through the budget that we're currently operating on now, we presented a list of parameters or guidelines or boundaries, if you will, that has been recommended by staff to the committee today. They set out the sort of objectives and boundaries as to what you wish to see as priority and what you think needs to be changed, et cetera. The process would include – once we have your direction in terms of the parameters, staff would go away and prepare the detailed numbers, which would come back to us most probably at a meeting in January. I want to emphasize that based on the decisions and directions of the committee respecting the outlined parameters, the staff will be using those to prepare the 2017-18 budget estimates at a future meeting.

Before I move on to the Clerk, are there any general questions that members may have that you'd like to ask before we go to the presentation?

Seeing and hearing none, I would ask the Clerk to proceed.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few things. I'd like to introduce some people around the table. I'm sure they're familiar faces to you, or I hope they are. Immediately on my left is Scott Ellis, who is the director of financial management and administrative services, chief information officer, senior financial officer, and that's more than enough room for the business card. Shannon Dean is the Law Clerk and director of House services. Cheryl Scarlett is the director of human resources and information technology services. It's almost a year, and I'm getting these right now.

Also, there are other managers. There is Brian Hodgson over there, sitting away from the table, somewhat secretly. He's the director of visitor services and security and ceremonial services and Sergeant-at-Arms when he's at home. A number of managers are up in the right section there, who may be called upon during the meeting, of course. Janet Schwegel, up in the far left there, is the manager of *Hansard*.

Now that we've finished that, I just want to say, as the question has been raised: why are we looking at parameters before we look at the actual numbers? There's a bit of a story here. It won't be a long one. What happened years ago was . . .

**The Chair:** Caution: Mr. Reynolds' stories are never short.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Hopefully, very fascinating, though.

In any event, a few years ago what used to happen was that the Assembly used to just present the budget, as it were, so members would be faced with the numbers and have to sort of unpack the numbers and the assumptions. I can't remember how long ago – years go by quickly – but a member said: well, why don't we have a meeting to look at the parameters before you start putting the numbers together so that we can look at the assumptions that go into the budget before you start calculating all the numbers?

**The Chair:** Hon. members on the telephone, could you mute your phones, please. Thank you.

**Mr. Reynolds:** In any event, it seemed like a good idea in retrospect, so that's why we've come forward to provide these parameters, so that we can go back and start calculating numbers. I think you'd agree that if we don't have the direction and we come up with these numbers and then we're told, "Oh, no; make a different assumption," that's a little more difficult. We'd like to get this ahead of the game, if you will. We also feel that this is an opportunity for you to have perhaps a more general discussion than when you're confronted with the specific numbers. If you will, it's almost an in-principle discussion, if my colleagues don't blanch when I say that.

In any event, I'd like to go through some of the points that are in the budget parameters document.

**The Chair:** Just as the Clerk is getting ready the details, as you've read in your packets, this will be the second and, I would suggest, maybe the third year in a row that there have been zero increases to the budget document, so the context of that is pretty clear.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you took the words right out of my mouth there. You can see in the parameters document that there's no general inflationary factor for budgeted operational costs, which is another way of saying that we're not looking to increase the amount overall of our budget. For instance, just to detail this so that it's complete, there are no market or in-range merit increases for LAO management, nonmanagement staff, and their compensation rates will be frozen at the March 31, 2016, levels for fiscal year 2017-18, so no increases for performing the same job.

**9:20**

One of the factors that we don't control – actually, it's a little difficult to budget for right now, but I'm just telling you – is the premiums that we pay; for instance, the employer contributions for, let's say, EI, CPP, and the different components of Blue Cross. Of course, that factors into the caucus budgets and the constituency office budgets as well in terms of the amounts we have to pay for employees. There's really nothing we can do about that. We just have to see what the actual premiums are.

One of the assumptions that we make in a budget is based on the number of sitting days or sessional days for the sessional calendar. We have assumed 75 sessional days, with an average of 30 sitting hours per week, and we've assumed 82 committee meetings, averaging three hours per meeting, so that's 246 hours in total.

With respect to pay and benefits for members, in keeping with what's in the orders, we have assumed a zero increase in pay and benefits for members.

Now, just to get a little technical here, let me ask you: did everyone happen to bring their green books? If you didn't, we will have extra copies available for you, or you can have a photocopy of the green book if you wish. These are the consolidated Members' Services Committee orders. I'm just going to go through a few orders here specifically. Maybe Jessica or Karen can help out and distribute them. I'm sorry; if you're on the phone, there's not much we can do.

**Cortes-Vargas:** It's online.

**Mr. Reynolds:** It is online. There you are.

If I could just go through this, hopefully quickly. If you look at page 8 in the green book – that's the technical term for it – it's the Constituency Services Order, and we're looking at section 1(3)(a), clauses (i) to (iii). You know, it goes through that there's a certain amount for office operations in rural and urban constituencies, that there's an amount for staffing, and that there's an amount for supplies. Now, in the budget we're proposing, we are recommending that these parameters not increase. One of the assumptions is that there will be no increase in these amounts. This is up to you, of course, to tell us whether you agree or not.

Another thing. If you look at 1(3)(b), once again on page 8 – this has all the excitement of taking tax law, I must say – it is proposed that the rate be held at the current 2015-16 level of \$1.30 for MSA calculation purposes. Now, you may be saying to yourself: what is that \$1.30 for? Well, that was put in for postage. You may think it would be easier to just say that that's the postage allowance, which Mr. Ellis did in fact say to me, and I said: but people may not know that that's for postage. We're referring to it as 1(3)(b). Anyway, the postage for return letters, there and back, is actually \$1.70 now, so we're beyond \$1.30. However, in keeping with a zero increase budget, we are recommending that there be no increase in that \$1.30.

With respect to (c) – we're on page 9 now, at the top – there is another calculation there. This really is what we used for the – well, it's been called the promotional allowance. This provides funding for the purchase of promotional items that members give during the course of their duties. That's why it was there originally. Once again, we're proposing no increase.

[Ms Luff left the teleconference]

I'm not taking it personally.

In any event, there's going to be under 3(c.1) what we refer to as the matrix; not the movie, not the hotel. This is the matrix that's used to calculate, if you will, what constituencies get. It's sort of a difficulty of representing a certain riding, if you will, that's been with us for a number of years. There is a score laid out, and there's an adjustment, and we're proposing no increase to that in the upcoming fiscal year.

We're also proposing, just to move off the formula here, that there be, as I said, no market or in-range increases for caucus staff and that there wouldn't be a general inflation factor applied to caucuses. Caucus amounts would be based on the number of members, but the amount per member wouldn't change from what it was this fiscal year.

The parameters document would include specific funding for ongoing Legislative Assembly initiatives, which were identified as special projects and initiatives, which we'd be pleased to go over. A lot of them were related to technology improvements in these very committee rooms.

Once again, there will be funding in the 2017-18 budget for the Electoral Boundaries Commission. This is a bit of fun with figures here. There was no amount in last year's budget for the Electoral Boundaries Commission because the Electoral Boundaries Commission wasn't scheduled to be appointed during this current fiscal year. Everyone with me so far? Okay. So what happened was that the legislation was changed, and the Electoral Boundaries Commission had to be appointed by October 31, 2017. That's in this fiscal year. At a meeting it was approved that we go forward with a supplementary estimate to fund that \$1.4 million for this fiscal year. For the next fiscal year, the 2017-18 one, it's projected that the Electoral Boundaries Commission will require less money, so I think it's budgeted for slightly over \$600,000, is it?

**Mr. Ellis:** It's \$650,000.

**Mr. Reynolds:** For \$650,000. So that will be in the budget you will review for 2017-18.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions. I look forward to the discussion. As I say, there are numerous members of the LAO team who are prepared to answer your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** Before I go to your question, hon. member, the issues and the parameters, the consolidated orders that the Clerk referenced: it's much of that document and its parallel guidelines for caucuses and constituencies that really are the drivers in terms of what you want the priorities to be. I think it's Mr. Dang who is maybe chairing that subcommittee. That's the task before you, to determine if there is anything you want to change. Those consolidated orders have a long history to them and really drive everything that this committee is doing here today.

The Member for Lethbridge-East.

9:30

**Ms Fitzpatrick:** Okay. My question is specific to Lethbridge-East. Lethbridge-East is a 3 on the matrix, and Lethbridge-West is a 17. I'm not sure what the difference is, but it's over \$9,000 in terms of money that I don't get versus Lethbridge-West.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Scott may be able to address that. Just in case anyone is looking, the matrix scores are on pages 15 to 17 of the orders. I would say that right now we're not going to be reviewing the matrix as part of the budget exercise. That may be something that the subcommittee, chaired by Mr. Dang, may want to look at. It's a bit complicated.

I'll let Scott speak to the actual matrix components.

**Ms Luff:** Sorry. I just got dropped. I'm back now.

**The Chair:** Welcome, Robyn.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. The matrix methodology was developed some time ago. That methodology was developed by a former Electoral Boundaries Commission, as a matter of fact, where they looked at various factors that came into play and the difficulty of representing a particular constituency. Without getting into all the details of that, they considered the population, they considered the demographics, and they considered the number of boards, agencies, and commissions that are in that particular constituency, distance from the capital. A number of factors were brought in.

There was statistical analysis done, and they came up with the scores that you see reflected in the Constituency Services Order.

All we do is basically ask them to recalibrate those scores from time to time, but the methodology is their methodology. We've used it consistently over the last number of budgets and applied amounts of resources to those scores to assist members who have a higher degree of difficulty in representing their constituency. That's the matrix.

Past Members' Services Committee meetings have asked for information about the matrix, and we've provided it. We're certainly prepared to provide that again should that be, you know, a request from you.

**Ms Fitzpatrick:** I'll make it a formal request when I get back to my constituency, yeah.

**Mr. Ellis:** Sure.

**The Chair:** On that point, if it's of any value to other members, subject to the time availability of staff and yourselves, I'm sure that there could be a presentation so that they don't have to repeat, and other members will have that opportunity to look at it.

Are there any additional questions or comments?

**Ms Jabbour:** It just occurs to me that the Electoral Boundaries Commission will be doing a review. They would look at the matrix again as part of this review, or not?

**Mr. Reynolds:** No. If I may, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Reynolds:** The Electoral Boundaries Commission review – help me out here. It was when Bob Clark was the Electoral Boundaries Commission chair. So that was two ago because for the last one the chair was Judge Ernie Walter. This would have been I want to say about 2002 maybe.

Anyway, Bob Clark kind of took it upon himself to look at the difficulty that some members face. He looked primarily at rural areas and looked at the factors that the Supreme Court, really, had articulated for departing from representation by population like distance, number of school divisions, number of rivers, that sort of thing. He came up with this formula which is, to simplify it, based on the geographic size and complexity of the riding, as it were, with the number of municipalities or school boards, et cetera, that factor in. He took this upon himself. It's not a function of the Electoral Boundaries Commission as outlined in their statute. Pretty much, the matrix rests with us, being the Legislative Assembly and you members.

**The Chair:** Just to add to what the Clerk has said, I think the broad principles – and the Clerk has outlined them: distance, rural, urban, concentration, et cetera. The application of those principles would be with this committee and, given the review, more specifically, the subcommittee, chaired by Mr. Dang, if any changes were to come forward.

Are there any other questions or comments? On the phones? Are there any questions concerning the budget parameters, item 5, I believe, on the agenda?

**Mr. Cooper:** Yeah. You know, I'd just like to speak briefly in support of the parameters. I know that it's difficult work for the LAO to keep things at zeros. I appreciate the work that they do on many levels. To go through the steps of working to keep the costs down in a difficult economic time: I just wanted to express some appreciation of that. Certainly, we will be looking forward to seeing

all of the projections, but I definitely support the parameters of zeros.

**The Chair:** Any other questions or comments?

**Mr. McIver:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to express my appreciation for the work done and my support for a group effort to hold the line and have no increases. I also support the previous decision for Members of the Legislative Assembly to not have a pay increase. To hold the line on our office budgets I think is at least one good signal to the public that we're aware of the tough situation out there in Alberta. I know it doesn't come easy, so to the staff of the Speaker's office and the LAO I just wanted to express my appreciation for taking that responsible position, and I intend to support it.

**The Chair:** Thank you to both of you.

Member Cortes-Vargas, I believe you had a question.

**Cortes-Vargas:** I guess I have one question, but mainly I just wanted to thank all of the various managers and people present today. I know it takes a lot of work to bring all the branches together and to work within the parameters of keeping things at zero and recognizing that that also means range and merit increases, and that is something that all of you have done, not just this year but last year as well. I'd just thank you and acknowledge the work that goes into that. Of course, we see that being reflected in our caucuses and in our offices as well.

My only question is actually – at the end of the parameters there is a section that says:

In summary, with the exception of the Electoral Boundaries Commission... the LAO is proposing no increase from last year's budget. In addition, the LAO will look at areas where economies can be made while recognizing the need to provide services to Members.

I appreciate that. I believe you always are looking for ways in which you can find economies. I'm curious as to: are there, like, examples of places where you're looking into that?

**The Chair:** Just as an opening, keep in mind that the staff have not yet had an opportunity to look at that. It's just a broad principle that was applied. If they're there, I can tell you that the staff will be looking closely at that. I don't know that there's anything specifically identified now.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Well, I think that is part of the process of budgeting. We will see where there are more pressures in the system and where people feel that additional resources are required. A lot of these resources are required to meet the needs of the members and caucuses and constituency offices, so part of the discussion that we'll have is with respect to the finite pot of resources and how that should be distributed.

**9:40**

We haven't made any determinations yet on where the savings will occur. There may be some projects that are no longer active, which may result in some efficiencies being created. There also may be a desire to have bodies, if you will, moved over to certain divisions in order to meet a changing and challenging workload.

The long answer to your question is: we haven't identified the areas where there will be, if you will, less money required. Likewise, we haven't identified those areas where we may need to move resources. But I think it's important to state that we are operating on the principle that we have the same envelope that we did before and that we will be moving resources within that envelope. We're not looking to expand it.



**The Chair:** Thank you.

Any other questions or comments? On the phone?

If someone was prepared to make a motion, I'll have the motion read into the record.

**Mrs. Sawchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The suggested motion is that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare the 2017-2018 budget estimates according to the parameters approved at the November 25, 2016, committee meeting.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Sawchuk.

Is there anyone prepared to move that motion? Member Cortes-Vargas. All in favour of the motion, please say aye. On the phone, please say aye. Anyone opposed? The motion is carried.

I would seek the guidance of the Clerk. I believe there are some – I'm sorry. Member Cortes-Vargas.

**Cortes-Vargas:** I'm just preparing for what's coming next, which is that the budget is going to be detailed and passed out. Just from my experience last time, we, of course, had to come back to the committee a few times. So instead of waiting to see what it looks like and then making comments, I was hoping to pre-empt that and just kind of give an idea of – and I have documents that I can pass around to the members, and I've provided an e-mail to Karen so she can distribute it to the members on the phone.

Basically, what happened last time was that we got the budget summary, and it had estimates, but it didn't have actuals. Then we ended up coming back when we received some actuals. So I was hoping that we could, just from the very start, include some of those numbers. I have just provided a template because it's easier to outline this in a template, to say which columns – it would really be helpful to see during the presentation of it. I have a few more copies.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Mr. Chair, could I just make a comment?

**The Chair:** Sure. Go ahead.

**Mr. Reynolds:** One thing I neglected to mention is that there will be a few shifts with respect to the actual divisions in the LAO as a product of me becoming Clerk because certain things have shifted within the Legislative Assembly Office and certain responsibilities have changed. The divisions that existed before, some of them are going to change a little with respect to the Clerk's office, with respect to what is called House services here, which may have another name when we come forward. We're not meaning to be confusing; in fact, we're trying to eliminate confusion or reduce confusion – how's that? – so there may be some changes.

Of course, we don't mind coming forward and would welcome it, as we always do, with respect to what's happened in previous years – and, as best we can, would provide you with some figures. All I'm saying is that the figures may not be entirely congruous with what was in the previous years – I mean, I just want to get that out right now – in the sense of how the funding is grouped.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Cortes-Vargas:** Yeah. Just to follow up, I think, absolutely, there have been a few shifts that we've seen within the LAO's structure and administration. I mean, really, the purpose of this is to include the actuals in the estimates as well and to be able to track the variances, but that doesn't preclude us from keeping things in mind. I mean, we have you as our new Clerk, and that means that we have shifts in the way of responsibilities, so we can absolutely take that

into account. My hope was just that we didn't have to come back after receiving the first budget and then come back afterwards. I just was hoping to ask the other members to see if this is a proposal that we can all agree on, to just include the following columns.

**The Chair:** Let me just add to what the Clerk has said. Yes. Let me reinforce that there may well be shifts. The maximum budget you're going to see – I think the point the Clerk is making is that there may be shifts inside the envelope, but we won't exceed the size of the envelope. I think the actual that you're talking about: you're looking for the column that will project, based on expenditures this year, what the projected actual would be. Is that it?

**Cortes-Vargas:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** Okay. Are there any objections? I don't know if we need a motion on this. The Clerk is just consulting here.

**Mr. Reynolds:** If I may, Mr. Chair. With respect, to the member, we will, yes, meet your desire for this sort of template, and I think, you know, we will . . .

**Cortes-Vargas:** It doesn't have to look exactly like this.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Okay. That's what I was going to say. That's why I don't think it needs a motion. You know what? We'll work with this. We definitely get the principle that you're talking about, and we're going to, you know, incorporate it, and we're going to try and meet what it is that you're asking for.

What I'd say, though, Mr. Speaker, is that it may not look exactly like this, and that's why I'd say that I don't – with respect, I'm not sure that we need a motion on this. I think this is advice to the LAO, and we're accepting it, and we will do our best to provide the information that's outlined in the template. I hope that's satisfactory.

**Cortes-Vargas:** I mean, the point of the template was just to be clear on intention. Sometimes it's hard while discussing this to explain the different columns and what they were looking like, so I put it in a template for that reason. If you're understanding my intention, that's really the hope, and if other members of the committee are okay with that, then I don't see a need for a motion either.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Sorry, Mr. Chair, once again. I'm wondering if the members on the phone have had an opportunity to see this.

**The Chair:** Karen just said that she sent it out.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Okay. Great.

**Mr. Cooper:** Yeah. We got a copy of the e-mail.

**The Chair:** So I don't – I'm looking at Scott.

**Mr. Ellis:** Sure. Just to tag on to what the Clerk has said, we're prepared to look at different format options. With that come some complications, as the Clerk has alluded to, with respect to comparability if there are changes in the structure of the organization. Another example of that would be changes in the numbers of caucus, private members, et cetera. So it does add an element of complexity in understanding why those numbers changed. However, the Clerk has also mentioned that we want to be open and transparent with these things, so we're prepared to provide the information, provide the explanations, and move forward in a manner and in a format that provides you with the information that you need to make a decision.

9:50

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think that's the motion. Karen will make reference to these documents that were cited as a guideline and a reference. I'm sure there will be much communication. The issue that both the Clerk and Scott have made is that if those kinds of shifts take place within the envelope at the budget meeting, the staff will be explaining why there may or may not be a difference from the past year. I think it's understood by staff, the direction we're going to go.

Are there any other questions? Yes.

**Mr. Cooper:** Yes. Just a quick comment, I guess. Like, I think that this – you know, I understand what the member is trying to accomplish, and I think it's a reasonable goal to get done. I'm just wondering if we might be asking all other departments in the government to provide this level of detail at estimates as well.

**Cortes-Vargas:** Well, that's an interesting question because, actually, this was inspired by the Alberta Health Services budget, the way that they explain their budget. That's actually where it came from.

**The Chair:** Mr. McIver, you had a question?

**Mr. McIver:** Yeah. I'm concerned about this, Chair. It's not that I don't appreciate the effort that Member Cortes-Vargas put into this, but we've got to remember that this isn't just for us and it isn't just for our staff. This is also for 4.3 million Albertans to understand how the government and the LAO's budget operates. I would be more comfortable seeing something come from Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance saying that if we're going to reformat all the departments – yeah. Otherwise, you've got, again, 4.3 million Albertans. While all of us on the call get paid full-time to look after these things, a citizen who's not directly involved and on the payroll should be able to pick up the financial reports from the different departments and understand them without having to learn 26 different formats.

The only reason I'm not going to support this is because – if we are going to make a format change and we can explain it publicly and make it, again, so that the members of the public don't have to learn dozens and dozens of reporting formats so that they can comfortably and easily and quickly look at the government's budget documents, then I might be okay with that. But one-offing, as this seems to be, the budget format – and I respect that Member Cortes-Vargas says that she's copying all or part of it from AHS or from Health. I would rather see consistent reporting for that reason and make it easier for the public to be able to keep track of us and make us all more accountable.

**Cortes-Vargas:** I'm not really understanding where you're coming from there just because, from my understanding, the LAO has prior to this even operated a different way of distributing budgets than Treasury Board. Maybe we can provide more details on that. The template has been different already, so it's not changing a system. It was expressing an intention quite like last year at the second part of our meeting, when we received actuals. It's just adding two columns. I'm not changing the format; I was providing an example. They can maintain the same format that they've had before, which, coincidentally, is not the same as other ways of explaining the budget within Treasury Board. That's already different. I'm not actually proposing something that is new here. I'm not formalizing an overall change. The LAO, from my understanding, has a different way of presenting that budget.

**The Chair:** Are there any other questions or comments on the matter?

**Mr. Ellis:** I can comment on that. We report in the same format and fashion to Treasury Board, at the end of the day, for consolidation of all the estimate documents. So we have a format, that is a standard format, that all government departments have to adhere to in terms of how they prepare the information and provide it for the consolidated estimate summary that is presented in the House. We have complied with that and will continue to comply with that.

Where we perhaps deviated somewhat is in the presentation of the budget estimate to the committee. We've provided in some cases a lot more detail than what a government department would provide, based on input from the committee about how they would like to see things. We can incorporate this different format and still comply with our reporting responsibilities in the consolidated estimates summary that's prepared. So I see the two as being the same and something that's easily doable.

**Mr. McIver:** Okay. Thank you, Scott. I appreciate that explanation.

**The Chair:** Are there any other questions or comments? My sense is that there's a consensus to move on, but are there any other comments or questions?

Hearing and seeing none, we will note receipt of that request in the minutes.

In case you have not yet seen the memo that I sent out earlier this week, I want to remind you that the member profiles are now online, a comprehensive resource detailing the legislative service of every MLA that has been elected in Alberta's history. You'll remember that we discussed this earlier. Excuse me. I said that it is online; it's not online. I'm seeing Ms Footz sitting back there and correcting me. It's on December 2. I think that's what my memo said.

I sincerely hope that you find this new information helpful, in particular the assistants and the legislative staff and the researchers alike. At the outset of this meeting I mentioned the people like the recorders, *Hansard*, the library, staff that are supporting all of us in this democratic system. This is an example of the work that gets produced and makes each of us better informed. Certainly, I know that it's an interest of people who are doing research in our universities and colleges and other institutions. So I just wanted to underline that, and I urge all the members to click on the site and the information that is available. On behalf of all of you to the Clerk and Ms Footz and your staff: again, thank you for doing that. And they met the timeline that they were working in.

Are there any questions or comments on that? Thank you.

To the Clerk or Scott, on the date of the next meeting – timelines, dates – would you like to share your thoughts with respect to that?

**Mr. Ellis:** The deadline for us submitting our estimates to Treasury Board for consolidation of them with the government estimates is the end of January. That's what they've said to us at this point. We realize that there are time pressures, and we have a vacation period for the holidays around Christmas to deal with as well. I think that we can go back and start to prepare the information and come back whenever it's convenient for the committee and members to meet. I'm anticipating – and the Clerk may have some more comments on this – that it may be in January, but at what point in January we're not sure just yet.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clerk, do you have anything to add?

**Mr. Reynolds:** Well, just that when you look at the schedule, I mean, we now have to go back and prepare the budget. Like you,

we have session mode, as it were, when resources are divided. Really, we're looking at the holiday season, and in January we'll have to find a time when it's convenient for members to meet. It may be the case that it might not be until later in January just due to availability. But Mrs. Sawchuk will be canvassing for dates at some point, so perhaps you could let her know what your schedules may permit.

**10:00**

**The Chair:** Any comments or suggestions?

I think that's a good idea, Mr. Reynolds. Maybe you can take a look at your own schedules for the month of January and give her a couple of options. I can tell you that mine is pretty full already.

Karen, did you have a comment?

**Mrs. Sawchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can send out our usual e-mail with some suggested dates for the third or fourth week of January, it sounds like, or whatever dates might work.

**The Chair:** Any questions or comments? You're agreed with that on the telephone?

As per previous procedure Karen will consult you and see if we can determine a date, and parallel to that, the Clerk and Scott are working on the budgets. We might set a tentative date. They may be ready earlier than that, or they may be available after that date, so stay tuned.

Are there any other items to come before the meeting today? On the phones?

Is there a motion to adjourn?

**Mr. Nixon:** So moved.

**Mr. Cooper:** So moved.

**The Chair:** The rush to the door.

All in favour? Opposed? Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 10:02 a.m.]









