



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Thursday, February 1, 2018
9:04 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)

Also in Attendance

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)

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
Al Chapman	Manager of Visitor Services
Cheryl Scarlett	Director of Human Resources, Information Technology and Broadcast Services and Acting Director of Financial Management and Administrative Services
Darren Joy	Manager of Financial Services, Financial Management and Administrative Services
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

9:04 a.m. **Thursday, February 1, 2018**

[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order.

Before we get started with our business items, I would ask that the members and those joining the committee at the table please introduce yourselves for the record. I will then call on the members joining the meeting via teleconference to introduce themselves. My name is Bob Wanner. I'm the MLA for Medicine Hat and chair of this committee.

Cortes-Vargas: Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and the deputy chair.

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

Ms Jabbour: Debbie Jabbour, MLA, Peace River.

Mr. McIver: Richard William McIver, MLA, Calgary-Hays, and friend of the people, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Good morning, Richard William.

Mr. Cooper: Nathan Cooper, the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mrs. Pitt: Angela Pitt, MLA, Airdrie.

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

Mr. McCuaig: Alex McCuaig, the Speaker's office.

Mr. Dang: Good morning. Thomas Dang, MLA for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Piquette: Good morning. Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Red Water.

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and director of House services.

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

Ms Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, director of HR, IT, and broadcast and acting director of financial management and administrative services.

Mr. Reynolds: Hi. Rob Reynolds, Clerk of the Assembly.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.
Robyn Luff, I believe you're with us. Is that right?

Ms Luff: Yeah. Robyn Luff, MLA for Calgary-East, here on the phone.

The Chair: Is there anyone else on the phone?

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

The Chair: Good morning, Greg.
Anyone else? Great. Thank you.

The meeting agenda and briefing documents were posted last week to the committee's internal site for members' information, followed by the interim report from the subcommittee to review the

MSC orders earlier this week. If anyone requires copies of these documents, please let the committee clerk know.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. The microphone consoles are operated by *Hansard* staff. Keep mobile devices on silent for the duration of the meeting. Audio and video of committee proceedings are being streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio and video access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly site.

Now to the approval of the agenda. Are there any additions or changes?

Mr. Cooper: Motion to approve the agenda as presented.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, everyone in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed? The motion is carried. Now, that includes Robyn and Greg. Agreed?

Ms Luff: Agreed.

Mr. Clark: I would agree if I could, but I can't.

The Chair: Yeah. Sorry, Greg.

Members should have copies of the minutes from November 8, 2017. Are there any errors or omissions to note? If not, would a member move adoption of the minutes? Mr. Nixon. All in favour, please say aye. All opposed, say no. Thank you. The motion is carried.

Now, the first item on the agenda is a matter that has been with us on several occasions, concerning access to former MLA benefits. A briefing document was posted to the internal website in this respect. As members may recall, this matter was initially brought forward at the September 26, 2016, committee meeting, and Ms Scarlett and her office, based on direction from the committee, have been working with the LAO service provider to explore a supplemental retiree plan to provide options for extended coverage for eligible former MLAs at no additional cost to the LAO.

Before I turn it over to Ms Scarlett, I'm noting, Mr. Nixon, that you have a question.

Mr. Nixon: I'd like to move that
we accept the LAO's recommendation.

The Chair: It's the first time I've ever seen you that quick, Mr. Nixon.

To the question, Ms Scarlett has some more detail if anyone else would like. But if that's the wish of the committee, I would just ask Cheryl a question. When was the last communication with the former members' association? I think there were some e-mails in the last month or something. Is that correct?

Ms Scarlett: With respect to this proposal our communication is to you and the committee.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I actually saw Mr. Zwozdesky, who's the president of the former members, over Christmas, just by accident, and he indicated that they were very interested in this. I just mentioned to him that it would be decided or considered at this meeting, probably.

9:10

The Chair: Okay. If there are no questions and you would not like to hear Ms Scarlett's presentation – I'm sensing that someone could read the mood of the standing committee – it recommends that the

Legislative Assembly Office formalize its participation in the new retiree plan with Alberta Blue Cross and that eligible former members be made aware of the option to apply for this plan at age 75 or earlier should they so choose. I believe, Mr. Nixon, that that was your motion. Is that correct?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah, to accept the LAO's recommendation.

The Chair: Any questions? All those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. The motion is carried. I'm sure that if we move this quickly, we will be out in about 15 minutes.

An update on broadcast proceedings, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will turn this over to Ms Scarlett, but first I want to say that things have proceeded rapidly. No doubt as members I believe you might have received some comments from constituents that question period was not on the television in the fall. We've moved rapidly on that, and I have to say that we've achieved amazing success in a short period of time. The CRTC accepted and approved our application for a channel. As Ms Scarlett will tell you, we've had very exciting developments with cable. My terminology is a little out of date now; I still refer to TV. We've had amazing progress with the cable providers, as Ms Scarlett can tell you about. I just want to thank the staff of broadcast services, who've done a tremendous job in a very short period of time, and all the other LAO staff who've participated.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. I agree. For the CRTC to get it approved that quickly is quite interesting.

Go ahead, Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: To follow up on what has been said, then, based on receiving the CRTC approval, what this means is that we can make our signal available to Alberta cable companies, which, in turn, will set up a Legislative Assembly channel on their network, if you will. We have initiated conversations, and I'm pleased to confirm that in addition to what was previously available on the TV in terms of only being able to view it, in terms of the OQP, now it will be gavel to gavel, and some of our committee meetings will be on our channel.

We have confirmation that for the start of the session, the spring session, we will be set up with Telus Optik, and we continue to work with our other service provider in terms of that same kind of situation as soon as we can possibly get that set up.

Of course, it's still available on the Internet, and that's the proceedings gavel to gavel of session and our committee meetings. In our broadcast area we will continue to work, at the Clerk's direction here, in terms of how we can in the future enhance those services to the public.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would like to thank and congratulate the staff for getting that done. To the extent that it'll matter to them, I want to thank the CRTC for making this possible, too.

Can we tell our constituents what channel will be Leg.-o-vision? Do we know yet for each of the cable providers?

Ms Scarlett: I don't have that confirmation yet, but as soon as we do have that, we will be providing any updates to members prior to session. We will also be posting it on our website and perhaps through some other ways of getting that message out.

Mr. McIver: Do we need a motion for this, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: I don't believe so. We authorized staff to proceed. The intent of the committee before was to get the task complete, and I'm pleased that they were able to do it so quickly. I can tell you that my office received a number of questions and concerns about not accessing it, and I know many MLAs did the same. So I think . . .

Mr. McIver: Those sixes and sixes of people that watch will be very happy. Actually, I think it's more than that, Mr. Speaker. I think this actually does matter. Whether people watch or not, I think it's most important that they get the opportunity to watch, should they choose, and we are providing that opportunity. I'm very happy with that.

Thank you.

The Chair: To just add a supplement to Cheryl's comments, most probably at the appropriate time we'll make some media releases as well so that the public is well informed ahead of time.

Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Given that it sounds as though we're going to have our own channel sort of for our discretion, I'm just wondering. I know my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and I would like to propose a reality television program called *Big and Little*, where we would sort of lay out for the people what it's like to be an opposition MLA and ways that people can engage in the democratic process. I'm not sure where that proposal gets sent to, but I just wonder if it might be a possibility for us.

The Chair: I heard the rumour about that. I understand that the first special guest you were going to have on your program was Mr. Dang, but I'm not sure if that's been . . .

Mr. Cooper: Brother Dang, actually.

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments?

Cortes-Vargas: I think we're about to approve a budget.

The Chair: Be able to cut that one.

Thank you.

Seeing and hearing none, I think we'll move on to the interim report, the subcommittee on the review of the Members' Services Committee orders. Members should have a copy of the interim report of the subcommittee reviewing the MSC orders, which was posted to the internal committee website this week. I would ask that Mr. Dang, the subcommittee chair, speak to this item of business, and then maybe with the permission of the table we'll allow Mr. Dang to go through the document and then go back and ask specific questions if that's agreeable.

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I think the subcommittee has been doing a lot of work for the last just over a year now, and it's gone through various iterations of different issues. But the mandate of the committee was very clear. We were to cover quite a broad reach of issues. If we remember back to September of 2016, the motion was that

the Members' Services Committee strike a subcommittee to conduct an extensive review of all Members' Services Committee orders but not include any review of members' compensation, including benefits.

Subsequently, there were some additional matters referred to the subcommittee from this committee as well.

I hope everyone has had the opportunity to review the document themselves. I don't have to go through each item line by line if that's preferred. I'm seeing some nods around the room. I guess I'll just go over the things that I think may be more relevant for today's meeting.

There are some recommendations around issues that the caucuses agreed on that I think can be left if there are any particular questions, but the important one, I think, is going to be recommendation 3.9 today, which is caucus funding and official party status. The subcommittee had some extensive discussions about this – I'm just flipping to the page in my book here; it's page 11 – and it was determined by a majority of the subcommittee members that while certain parties do not reach the threshold for official party status or are not recognized as opposition parties, it would be perhaps too punitive to remove any funding or change any of the funding formula at this time. So the subcommittee is recommending today that for all parties the budgets for their caucuses remain the same at this time. I think that's the largest recommendation for today.

There are a number of other issues. This is, of course, an interim report, so there are other things that have to come back to the table as well. We have not completed all the issues that the caucuses have agreed on, so we do want to go back. I won't touch on anything else unless there are particular issues. I think those are the key issues for today.

Are there any questions?

9:20

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to Member Dang for your comments. There certainly was some significant work done on the interim report, and I can confirm that there was widespread agreement on a number of issues. The caucus funding and official party status issue was one where there definitely were some concerns shared. Just, I guess, for the purpose of today's conversation I also don't have an issue with the recommendation in the interim report about not making substantive changes to caucus funding.

I would like to just highlight that there actually is no clear direction in the Alberta Legislature for what is and what isn't a party, and I have some significant concerns and reservations around this very fact. I know – or I can only imagine, I think, is probably a much more fair statement. I can only imagine that it provides some concern for the Speaker's office to have to rule on what is and isn't a party based upon precedent and, you know, past decisions and previous Speaker rulings and that sort of thing. Some clarity around what is and isn't a party here in the Alberta Legislature probably would be very useful.

I speak as an individual member here, but I think that as a committee we would be well served to ensure that the rules about what will be and what won't be a party after the next general election are of some significant importance. I don't think it's fair that we task the outgoing or the incoming Speaker with making some of those determinations. I think that we are the masters of our own destiny or our own domain or whatever the *Seinfeld* reference is there. At the end of the day, we are the ones responsible, or this committee is, for determining what is and isn't a party. It's certainly my hope that this is work that can be completed by what essentially is the end of this year as the election window is upon us very shortly thereafter. I think that we should do everything we can to make sure that this work actually gets done even if that means making some difficult decisions.

I also think that those decisions should be future-looking so as to not have negative impacts, potentially, on existing members and their caucuses based upon decisions that the Speaker or previous Speakers have made. You know, this isn't about attacking certain caucuses or not but setting up clear rules for the future so that we're not in this particular space after the next general election.

I'll leave my comments at that, but I think you can tell that I have some concern that it appears that we're punting this decision further down the road when I believe it could have been made today. But I look forward to continuing to be a strong advocate on making this decision prior to the next election.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before I recognize the next person, just for the information of committee I received a letter from Dr. Swann. I believe I received it yesterday. You may want to reference that.

Are there any questions or comments with respect to the subcommittee report? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to add – and thank you to Mr. Cooper for his comments. I should have of course mentioned that I was CCed on that letter from Dr. Swann but also that in the interim report itself it does state that we'll continue our discussions on this matter and that these recommendations are for the 2018-2019 fiscal year, and the subcommittee may make additional recommendations for further years past that. I think that hopefully addresses some of Mr. Cooper's concerns. I know he was substituting at that meeting, so I know he did bring that up. I appreciate that that is something that the subcommittee could possibly like to clarify in the future.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Do other provinces define, province by province, what is official party status, what number of members?

The Chair: Shannon or Rob?

Mr. Reynolds: I believe Shannon can refer to – she may have that information right at her fingertips. Or not.

Ms Dean: Through the chair, Mr. McIver, there's a wide range of approaches across Canada. There are different thresholds depending on the size of the jurisdiction. Cheryl may have some specific numbers handy, but we'd be happy to provide the research that was undertaken to the rest of the committee. We did a cross-jurisdictional analysis in terms of what constitutes an official party across the country.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Okay. Well, let me say that the report today: I'm happy to support the recommendations, but I share Mr. Cooper's concerns. If my historical understanding is correct: if not official status, there used to be a precedent, if you will, that a party needed four members to get party funding, and a decision was made at some time in the past to go away from that, I think, during a period of time where one party had almost all the seats and felt that it was important to have some opposition. Anybody that was in the other seats was given additional status as a party so they could have research and stuff to hold the government to account. I think the government of the day kind of saw the necessity of having opposition because I think opposition is an important part of government. Whether you're in the government or whether you're in the opposition, it's important either way.

I think if we're going to have further discussions about creating an official party status, I don't see any reason why there couldn't be contingencies put in that policy that if no opposition has four seats or more, then of course you could reduce the number in those instances. Then that wouldn't be that complicated to do and would make perfect sense to me.

However, in any event, making the change mid-term: if we were to do that, I agree with Mr. Cooper that that would seem to some people and maybe a lot of people to be – what's the word? – punitive, picking on the little guy, if you will, something we don't want to do. That's why making a change for further terms of office could be done. Of course, none of us know which party will have many seats in further terms of office, and it would seem less punitive to do it for further terms of office rather than make the change mid-term. Perhaps that's something we'll consider in the future.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, I understand you have a question.

Mr. Clark: I do. I appreciate the opportunity to offer some comments here, and thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. I do just want to clarify some of the comments I've heard, particularly from Mr. Cooper and Mr. McIver, that, you know, the precedent is very clear in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The granting of party status and the caucus resources that go along with that and the questions in Oral Question Period that go along with that is not some random decision that was made as a favour. It's based on substantial precedent in this Legislative Assembly. As Ms Dean has noted, there's tremendous variation in how this question has been addressed by individual Legislative Assemblies across the country.

Our role as the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is to make rules that fit the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Those rules in our Legislature are based on very clear precedents dating back to 1982, where there were 2 two-member caucuses, one independent and one New Democrat, again in '86, again in '97, again in 2001, again in 2008. So this isn't something that's just been plucked from the air, and it's not something that doesn't have a very substantial precedent base to back it. I just want to be very clear that this is not something that's been granted as some sort of favour to the smaller caucuses in the Legislative Assembly. There is very clear precedent and rules that have created the frame under which caucus funding and questions in Oral Question Period have been allocated. So I just want to make sure we're very clear on that.

9:30

I do have a question for Mr. Dang about the next steps here on the committee, so section 3.10. You've referenced it here that there is going to be work that continues to come up with a final report. Is there a timeline for that work? That's question 1. Question 2 is: I certainly would appreciate an opportunity for us in the Alberta Party caucus. I imagine the smaller caucuses, the Liberals and PCs, would certainly also appreciate an opportunity to present to that committee if work is ongoing, especially as it relates to party status but perhaps for other aspects as well.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'll address the first part first. For future reviews the work is ongoing. I would say that we have done a substantive amount of work, and a large number of the action items that the caucuses wanted addressed have been considered at this point. A future meeting is to be scheduled. So we are moving forward, and I would expect that we will be done fairly quickly.

As for your second point, around inviting the other caucuses to present or speak to the subcommittee, I will definitely put that question to the subcommittee itself, and we will have to get back to you on that issue.

Cortes-Vargas: I think I just want to comment on some of the work that has been done, and it's been quite comprehensive. There has been a lot of work being put into the subcommittee, and there have been a lot of discussions. I believe that Mr. Clark has actually contributed to those discussions, and the various letters that you wrote were documents that were viewed by the subcommittee and discussed thoroughly.

Just in that circumstance, too, there are various ways to present to the subcommittee, but I absolutely, following the chair's lead, always encourage the conversations from any of the members that have approached us, even the ones that are not on the subcommittee, you know, members that have insights on things about the Members' Services orders that they think are unclear or should be reviewed. People have been free to approach us on those issues, and we're open to listening to those things. I think it was needed to review the Members' Services orders, and that's what we really found, that some places needed some clarity and a new perspective, and that's why we found it important also to communicate some of the things that we have been doing. The interim report includes more than just what is applicable to what we need today, which is a caucus funding piece.

I really appreciate all of the work that everyone has done and, then, that staff has done in order to do that. There has been an intensive amount of back and forth on information and discussions. So I just want to extend my thanks for that. I look forward to continuing the work. I know that we're starting to reach a few points that are finalizing and continuing this discussion around caucus funding, as Mr. Clark said, but also, as the opposition has mentioned, there is precedent and there is some sense of guidelines. But there is a way to establish a clear set of guidelines that can also reflect some of the precedent but to make it so it is clear for everybody as to what defines when you receive party status and to have those clearly set out.

That doesn't undermine the precedent, that that really takes those things into account and solidifies them into an overarching guideline, so it's something that people can understand and can reference, right? I mean, part of having the Members' Services orders is having a place that starts off and you can reference to, all the main rules that guide, you know, how we're funded on various levels. To have that information maybe included in there is something that I think would be valuable for clearing up some of the debate that we can refer back to, knowing that "official party status" means this and whatever the case may be of how we take that discussion. I think it's important, and I think it's something that we could definitely work on over the next year.

I think it's important to also honour that the committee did want to make sure that we were being fair and equitable to as many members in this Legislature as possible by not trying to make some decisions, you know, during a fiscal year, which would impact their current budgets. I think we will continue taking that perspective and be thoughtful about the way we move forward. We know that the impact is very real for the government members and the opposition that have caucuses, and I think that we need to be conscious about those things.

I definitely welcome the discussion. It's one that's important, and from what we've seen in the crossjurisdictional analysis, it's also very varied, depending on the size of the Legislature, the number of legislative seats, what's considered at certain points, some that are made based on precedent, some that have the detailed rules. I think

that that's why Members' Services orders were reviewed but also why, if we want to take another look at these things, we should do it. There are other jurisdictions that have moved on some things and others that haven't, and I think that's an opportunity for us as committee members to contribute to building a strong foundation for future members coming in. I think that, again, I would just welcome any conversations along the matter, and we have been carefully reviewing consequences as we go forward.

Those are some comments on it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you.
Ms Luff.

Ms Luff: Yeah. Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to, I guess, echo some of the comments that have been made already. Thank you to the members of the subcommittee for doing the work. I know that it's been extensive, and you've been working really hard, so just thanks for that. I support the recommendations to not make any changes, you know, for this upcoming fiscal year, but I do, like Mr. Cooper and Member Cortes-Vargas were just mentioning, think that there is value in having some sort of concrete rules for establishing when we choose official party status and when people get leaders' allowances and things of this nature. I would support any direction of the committee looking into those things. I support them talking with members of all different parties when they're doing this.

I'm not, you know, particularly picky on the number. It doesn't make a difference to me whether it's one or two or three or four or whatever gets you official party status. I think it's important for all parties in the Legislature to have a way to voice their opinions. I think it's important that we establish those rules so that, going forward, it makes it easier for the Speaker to make decisions and for people to know what to expect.

I just wanted to get that on the record. Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Chair. Just a couple of quick points that I wanted to just provide some clarity on. I think Mr. Clark did a fine job of making my point, and my desire is to provide clarity, not ambiguity, when it comes to the fact that the decision has been made on precedent, but there are no rules. That precedent has been a bit fluid in that it has not been applied the same at all times, which is understandable because the circumstances have changed. I would say that it was fairly unprecedented for a caucus of one member to receive a quarter of a leaders' allowance immediately following the 2015 election. I agree with your assessment that there have been lots of times when two-member caucuses have been funded but few times when one-member caucuses have been provided allowances.

My point here is not whether or not the Alberta Party or any other party should or shouldn't have been receiving the funds. You know, I think that it's reasonable that small caucuses should in fact receive funds. My point is that there must be clarity around exactly what that looks like. Whether it's a two-member caucus, a three-member caucus, a four-member caucus – I think that is up for debate – there certainly needs to be clarity and not just what we have seen.

9:40

The other thing that I might add is that if the PC caucus still exists, by the sounds of things – and certainly perhaps the United Conservative caucus took on a lot of responsibility of the previous Progressive Conservative caucus. Perhaps if that caucus still exists, they would be inclined to take on some of those responsibilities as well. I think that would be the only other comment I might add with respect to small-member caucuses and Mr. Clark's points.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments?

Cortes-Vargas: Just briefly, I know that there's an element – I don't know if we have to move to accept the report. I'm just seeking guidance, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Chair, I have a question about a different section of the report if I may.

The Chair: I'll get back to you, Greg.

It would be my understanding that we probably ought to adopt the report because it is suggesting some changes. Would you agree, Mr. Clerk?

Mr. Reynolds: I would say that with respect to the interim report, I mean, there's one motion coming out of it or one recommendation, really, right? So that's the recommendation you want to adopt. The others are not, as I understand it, being recommended at this time. I mean, they may be . . .

Cortes-Vargas: So just the caucus spending part?

Mr. Reynolds: I imagine. That's how I interpret it.

Cortes-Vargas: That would be the part that would be applicable today.

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. I thought that was the intent, but I may be mistaken.

Cortes-Vargas: All right. I just wanted to clarify this process.

The Chair: Mr. Clark's question might give a perspective on that. Greg, go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Well, I do want to address another section of the report. I have a question. But I guess just to this previous discussion about whether we adopt the report, again, I just want to ask Member Cortes-Vargas: are you suggesting this report and all of its interim recommendations are adopted and implemented, or is it just simply section 3.9?

Cortes-Vargas: That was, in fact, what I was clarifying. My understanding is that we can just go to adopting the caucus funding recommendation because that is what is needed for the budget discussion that we're going to have after this, and then, because it's an interim report, it seems like the recommendations are still in the works, but it's a little bit more of a status update, I guess, than to solidify those recommendations and start implementation.

The Chair: Maybe we'll just go to your question about the substantive – Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, looking around the room here, I would say that we could move the entire report if that was the will of the committee. I'm seeing some nods around the room, so I would say that if somebody is willing to make that motion, then we should move forward with that as is.

The Chair: We'd still be able to speak to the questions that may come up by other members?

Mr. Dang: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll allow it, I will move the report to be accepted. Just for those that are on the phone

and whatnot, it's not with the intention of cutting off debate but, rather, to have something to debate before we vote on it, so on that basis I will be happy to move the acceptance of the report as written.

The Chair: I'm just going to clarify and welcome staff's perspective. I'm hearing, if I want to test a motion that you're doing, that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the interim report of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services orders and accept the recommendations contained in the report.

Subsequently – this is not in your motion – it's been suggested that I would table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it's the will of the committee to make a decision on the report in its entirety, then we will need some direction from the committee in connection with the coming into force of a number of amendments to the Members' Services Committee orders.

Mr. McIver: What do you recommend?

Listen, Mr. Speaker, I don't mean to be flippant about it, but the fact is that I think the committee – this is the report of the subcommittee, and I think it was largely agreed upon by the subcommittee, and Ms Dean asks a very, I think, good question. My answer, again, wasn't meant to be flippant, but it was: when can the administration reasonably action the recommendations of the committee? There's no point in having us say, "Put it in place next week" when they can't do it for six months. On the other hand, if they could do it in six weeks, I don't know why we'd drag our feet for six months. I'm just trying to find – I only ask not to be flippant but rather to find, hopefully, that hallowed middle ground where we're working in partnership with the administration and the staff.

Ms Jabbour: Just for clarity. I understand from what Mr. Dang has said that the subcommittee is still considering some other items that are not included in this interim report. So if we were to accept this report and all of the items so far, that work would still continue, and then you would bring subsequently other items that you're looking at. Is my understanding correct?

Mr. Dang: That is correct. We would bring back a final report at a later date.

The Chair: And to Mr. Clark's earlier question, Mr. Dang, at this stage you're not exactly certain when that final report would come back?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. We don't have a date, but I would expect that it is fairly soon.

Cortes-Vargas: I wonder if there is a way to actually be able to say that perhaps we can give the staff more time to come up with some timelines that would actually be appropriate according to what you have to do, because some might be easier to implement than others, right? And then, because we still have a final report that is coming out and we will have to discuss that part later as well, we can also, even in the subcommittee, discuss some of the implementation dates and include that in the final report.

The Chair: I'm just going to give staff a minute to review this matter. I'd like to maybe move back if we could. We have the intent of a motion at least on the table. Let's wait for the . . .

Mr. McIver: I don't think you've accepted my motion yet. I kind of floated it to see how we were, so I'm happy to get the advice we're getting right now.

The Chair: Right. I'm just suggesting as chair what we might do.

There are some substantive – I know that Mr. Clark has some questions with respect to the substance of the report. Go ahead, Greg. What is the question you had about the subcommittee report?

Mr. Clark: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I am fascinated to listen in as the members of the government side and the Official Opposition who are in the room and who also made up the members of the subcommittee just sort of casually rush through the passage of the report in its entirety without touching on any other substantive sections of this report, where there are some really, really big changes that are being proposed. So thank goodness someone is here to actually ask what I think are pretty important questions.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, you did have a question, right?

Mr. Clark: Let's look at page 8 and section 3.5. There are significant changes proposed to constituency communications that will make constituency communications highly partisan. There are two substantial changes, number 1 and number 2, the first allowing MLAs to use "party colours and for Members to identify their caucus affiliation." I'd love for committee members to enlighten us as to the rationale as to why taxpayers should fund political communications that look an awful lot like political parties'.

9:50

My biggest concern is number 2, "The prohibition on communications that contain personal criticism of another Member should be removed." What you're saying is that we should allow individual members, through taxpayer-funded communications that go to our constituents, to not simply inform them of what's happening in government or what the MLA is doing on behalf of their constituents but to tear down the other side. That is exactly what is wrong with politics in this province and in this country and, I'd say, in the world today. To think that Alberta taxpayers would be on the hook to fund that sort of thing and that this committee would just sort of hope that nobody would notice that change and all of a sudden we've got taxpayer-funded partisan communications flying around the province in a time when we have a government that, quote, unquote, has taken big money out of politics – well, you've put the biggest bank account there is into politics, and that's the budget of the province of Alberta funding that sort of communication.

While I don't have a vote on this committee yet – I will certainly be continuing to push that the Alberta Party caucus is in fact given a say in the governance of this Legislature – these two points I think deserve substantial debate and explanation from the members of the committee, and I'll leave it at that.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Well, it's disappointing to see Mr. Clark put words into a bunch of people's mouths, but, you know, whatever. We'll digress from that issue, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that we're trying to figure out how to get this issue to the table to have a discussion. Mr. Clark has made a lot of assumptions in those comments. In fact, he said that we were rushing through the vote process when my colleague Mr. McIver pointed out very clearly that we're trying to get something on the table to begin the discussion that he is referring to.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that I think at this point we're trying to do too many things at once. We need to deal with the report. Mr. McIver has a motion that he wants to get the report accepted. That's the motion that's on the table. Then we could bring forward some amendments if we want to change the report, or we could come up with some other dialogue. If the committee accepts the recommendations from the committee, with or without changes, then the next step would be to instruct the LAO, with feedback from administration, on how we could proceed from there.

I think, Mr. Speaker, with due respect, that we're trying to deal with two things at once. I think that's complicating the process, and it's unfortunately allowing a guest of the committee, another member, to be on the phone and grandstand on *Hansard*, making a whole bunch of assumptions about other people, which is disappointing. I suggest we get back to talking about the report. Then we'll figure out how we work with the LAO, who are very capable, on how we would implement that report.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. I was also disappointed to hear Mr. Clark complaining about making personal criticisms on the taxpayers' dime while he's on the phone making personal criticisms on the taxpayers' dime. I found that quite remarkable, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, what it really, in my view, intends to do is that when you send communications out to your constituents, not to be partisan – but I think as MLAs we've got to be able to say to our constituents, "The government decided to do this, and I agree with it" or "The government decided to do this, and I disagree with it." That's actually communicating with your constituents as opposed to being required to be a cheerleader for the government, whoever the government is. I think even government members could perhaps say, "Our government did this; it wasn't exactly the way I would have done it, but that's what we've done," or they might say, "What a great thing our government did." But the fact is that if you're going to be able to communicate with your constituents, you actually have to be able to communicate and say the things that you like and dislike about what happens.

I think the attempts by Mr. Clark to mischaracterize this were pretty rich. Indeed, his assertion that we're trying to sneak it in is actually quite the opposite of what's happening. By moving the report and putting it into the public realm, we'll actually invite public comment, public discussion and actually shine the light of day brighter on the report so that members of the Legislature and indeed all Albertans can look at the report and decide whether they like it or not and give us feedback from this point forward. So I still feel like the committee should push this report forward. Then it can be discussed, kicked around, and we can have that bigger discussion that will extend to all Albertans and all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair: Hon. members, unless there are any other detailed questions, I'm going to suggest that we take a five-minute recess and that we then reconvene and formally consider a motion.

Sort of related to the issue – maybe we can talk about it more, but this is more of a go-forward question that I would have. The future reviews undertaken every five years on the subcommittee report – let me just illustrate my question by example. We had an issue here over the last three to six months on a matter with respect to what members can and can't do with their rental units. I understand your report, your recommendation with the intent that if matters like that come up that we didn't anticipate, this committee can review and adjust on an as-required basis. Am I making my point here? If

something like this comes up, we don't have to wait five years to review it. We can come here and do that.

I'm going to suggest that we take a five-minute recess, and then I will entertain a motion from the floor.

[The committee adjourned from 9:56 a.m. to 10:17 a.m.]

The Chair: Members, if we could reconvene. For those watching, we've just had a recess concerning the subcommittee recommendations.

I would recognize Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: I think that where we left off was that we wanted to have a discussion, a motion on the table, so I'm just going to move right now that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve in principle the interim report of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders and that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee, that the subcommittee recommend amendments to the Members' Services Committee orders and implementation dates to be presented to the committee for approval at its next meeting.

The Chair: Okay. Are there any comments or questions on the motion at the table? Online, any questions?

Mr. Clark: Sorry. I apologize, Mr. Speaker, but could you just read that one more time?

The Chair: Karen will read it for us if that's agreeable.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve in principle the interim report of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders and that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee, that the subcommittee recommend amendments to the MSC orders and implementation dates to be presented to the committee for approval at its next meeting.

The Chair: Having heard the motion in question, all in favour of the motion, please . . .

Mr. Clark: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. If I may, I have some comments here if we're going to debate this motion.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I just want to reiterate my earlier point. What this motion does – you know, before I jumped in here, the committee was about to vote on this motion. Given that the two main parties were part of the subcommittee that wrote this interim report, I can only assume that it's very likely that it would be approved in its entirety.

I just want to say again and state again as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not as a guest at this committee but as a member of the Assembly, who has every right to attend and speak at these meetings, that, unfortunately, not being a member of the committee, I can't vote. If I could, I would vote against this because I have grave concerns about change to the constituency communications provisions here. Just to be very clear, as it stands now, members can offer criticism and feedback on government policy and actions in our constituency communications. That already exists. We can already do that. What they can't do is offer personal criticism of the exact words or contain personal criticism of another member.

Let's just be very clear what it means to remove the provision that prohibits personal criticism of another member. That means that the government, a government member, may by name call out a member of the opposition side. For example, a government member could say: "Jason Kenney does terrible things. We think that bad things are going to happen based on policy acts." A member of the opposition side could say, you know, "The Premier has done these terrible things, and we really don't like it." That is the kind of communication that turns Albertans off politics. The prohibitions that exist in the current rules I think are entirely reasonable, hold on to the last possible shred of respectful dialogue and discourse in political communications. Yes, I'm being very strong on this, and I know that that may hurt some feelings in the room, but I feel very strongly that this is something that Albertans will not tolerate. Frankly, had I not spoken up, it's very clear that this simply would have sailed on through into implementation.

My comments go also to the allowing of party colours in what is ostensibly or supposed to be nonpartisan communication paid for by taxpayers. I don't think Albertans would accept that if they knew it was happening, and my job is to make sure they know it's happening. I don't have a vote on this. If I did, I would vote against it, and I would strongly encourage all members to reconsider the adoption of the report in its entirety, to strike out at least recommendations 1 and 2 under section 3.5 on page 8.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Luff, you had a question?

Ms Luff: Yeah. Hi. I apologize because I don't benefit from being in the room during the recess, so I am not privy to the conversation that went on. If I could just get in some clarification questions. By voting for this motion, what this means is that this report will be made available to every member of the Assembly and that, moving forward, changes would still be able to be made prior to its adoption in full? I hear Mr. Clark's concerns, and quite frankly I wouldn't mind hearing an explanation from the subcommittee about that particular subsection that they're looking at removing. That concerns me a little bit as well. I'd just like to clarify that by voting for this motion, I am not ensuring that all of these recommendations are going through right away, that it is simply to be able to make the report available to all members of the Assembly and that we would be voting on adopting it in full at a later date. Is that correct?

The Chair: Shannon, would you like to speak to that matter? No?
Mrs. Pitt.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. It's unfortunate that Mr. Clark presumes that all members in this committee will be adopting motions on the table, certainly without discussion. I'd like to clarify that section 3.5, number 4, very clearly states and includes a definition of partisanship and clarifies "that the MSA may not be used to fund partisan materials or activities." However, in saying that, I would like to move that we strike from 3.5 number 2, that we amend the motion and strike number 2.

10:25

The Chair: Are you proposing that as an amendment to the motion?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, if I could clarify, is the intent, then, to strike it from the motion, not the report? So we'd accept the report without section 3.5, point 2, but the subcommittee could additionally make recommendations at a future date?

Mrs. Pitt: That's correct, yes.

The Chair: Karen, could you maybe share the intent, for everyone's sake, of Mrs. Pitt's amendment?

Mrs. Sawchuk: I believe the member wishes to add the words "with the exception of section 3.5, part 2" after the words "the interim report of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders" and before "that the Speaker table the report intersessionally."

The Chair: Is that understood? I recognize that I referred to that as an amendment. I'll just test with the table: do you agree that you're amending the original?

Mrs. Pitt: Yes.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments?

Mr. Nixon: Did we vote on that amendment? I didn't catch that. [interjection] Okay. I'll wait till we vote on the amendment. I've got a comment on the main motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: On the amendment, all those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. The amendment is passed.

Are we back to the main motion as amended now? Could we now read the motion as amended?

Mrs. Sawchuk: That

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve in principle the interim report of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders with the exception of section 3.5, part 2, that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee, and that the subcommittee recommend amendments to the MSC orders and implementation dates to be presented to the committee for approval at its next meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that we're back on the main motion here, I did want to concur with some of what Mr. Nixon did say already, which is that I think it's important to note that in these recommendations in the report itself there is an explicit definition of what is partisan, and that's really important. I believe Mrs. Pitt said it as well. We really do understand – the subcommittee understood – that it should be explicitly prohibited to do partisan activities in communications using government dollars. That's why the subcommittee set out to set a definition that would be in the orders, that would be clear for all members to be able to make decisions around what they should and should not be spending their money on.

I think it's really important that the subcommittee spent over a year on this interim report, and I think it's important to know that there was a lot of very good work done on a consensus model. So it was quite an endeavour by the members, and I'm very pleased with where we ended with some of these issues. I think that, moving forward, this motion as amended now is going to allow us to make the recommendations that need to be made.

The Chair: Ms Luff, you had a question on the amended motion?

Ms Luff: Well, just that my question that I asked previously was never really answered. Like, what we're doing here is that we're recommending this so that we can come up with some implementation dates but that the final changes to the Members' Services orders won't be made until a subsequent meeting.

The Chair: That would be my understanding of the intent of the motion, and it would be dealt with. This matter would be back at the next Members' Services Committee meeting, with some implementation dates and/or other additions or changes with respect to the orders. And I'm seeing that there seems to be a consensus at the table about the intent. So if that summarizes it for you, Robyn, yes, this matter on implementation will be forthcoming at a future meeting.

Ms Luff: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Are there any other – Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, again, for the record, to clarify very clearly, the report that came from the subcommittee clearly outright says that an "MSA may not be used to fund partisan materials or activities." Mr. Dang was referring to that. I think it's worth repeating that the subcommittee in no way is coming forward with recommendations to bring partisan advertising into the way the MSA is used by a member. The only other issue that I think Mr. Clark raised was in regard to (1), which also clearly points out that political party logos and political party websites, et cetera, cannot be referred to during constituency communications.

One thing that we did hear at the subcommittee level and that was discussed in a little bit of detail is the fact that every time – and we'll use Mr. Clark for an example – that he rises in the Legislature to speak, his party affiliation is shown on the screen. It is very, very clear, even on his LAO website, which party he represents in the Legislature. Albertans do want to know what their member's party is. So while making sure that the logo can't be there or any sort of party promotions but still recognizing where the member is is something that we already do in our daily work. That is not a significant change.

Other than that, though, I think that we've been able to come to some sort of a consensus to move forward, and I look forward to seeing what the actual member's services changes will be before we make our final decisions.

The Chair: I would just add closure from my perspective. Various issues have been discussed in this agenda, been reviewed. This is a timely and probably, from my perspective, an overdue change that needs to take place. I believe that if you examine the history of particularly the various allowances that are provided, it is a long and twisting road that brings us to today. I would urge that we continue as we have today to move forward on greater clarity for all of the members of the Legislature.

On the motion . . .

Mr. Clark: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. My sincere apologies. I'd just like to add one brief comment if I may before the vote.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Thank you so much. I appreciate your indulgence. I just want to thank the Member for Airdrie for her motion removing (2). I thank all members also for accepting that. I would still like to see (1) out. I do think that it is important to have some separation between identification of a Member of the Legislative Assembly and their political party. That puts us on somewhat of a slippery slope.

I'm certainly supportive of adding a more specific definition of partisan activities or materials as it relates to communication as the recommendation on the top of page 9 will do. I would suggest, though, that that probably already is prohibited. I think if any of us tried to add anything like that into any of our newsletters or caucus

communications, the LAO would certainly not allow that, but I'm absolutely on board with adding it in.

My final comment is that as the discussion amongst the subcommittee and Members' Services more broadly moves on towards implementation of these changes, I look forward to being a full and active participant in those discussions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Just to clarify one thing, Mr. Clark may still not have read (1), but it again clearly says that party logos and political party websites cannot be referred to. In fact, it doesn't say anything about referring to a political party at all or the name of a political party. Just to clarify, and then let's vote.

10:35

The Chair: The art of politics is to find ways to say yes and move forward in democracy, so thank you for your patience. All in favour of the motion as amended, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. The motion as amended is carried. Thank you.

One of the members – I don't have a very good track record of estimating these committee meetings as to how long they're going to last – asked if we are going to have lunch or not. My sense is that maybe we can get past the next matters in the next hour and a half, but that's pure – that's the intention. That's the sense. Probably none of us are good predictors of that.

We've just had a break. Let's keep moving. I think that we are on the 2018-19 legislative budget estimates and strategic business plan, which I'm proposing that we might, if you will – everyone has received a copy of the documents that were posted.

I want to compliment the staff for their considerable amount of time in developing the strategic business plan. I also want to thank this committee for encouraging the preparation of a more formal – there's always been one there. Nonetheless, I think it adds considerable value to reaching a shared understanding.

With your collective permission the Clerk and I will quickly walk through the business plan as proposed, with the strategic goals outlined. I suspect that on this one it's probably best that we – I don't know that it necessarily requires a motion or not at the end, but I guess the committee can determine that. It would maybe be as part of an omnibus motion that includes the budget.

Staff and management engaged in considerable discussion about the overall vision and mission and values. I want to thank them. I had a couple of meetings certainly with the Clerk and with the management staff. The first goal is pretty basic. We try to demonstrate some outcome measures. As we all know, it's a challenge sometimes to be able to quantify those matters. Clearly, as the Speaker I've heard over the last years that some issues needed to be updated, and I think that we've moved a fair amount in achieving those. I don't intend to read through this. Any questions on goal 1? Rob, would you like to add anything with respect to this particular goal?

Mr. Reynolds: Not really, Mr. Speaker. I think that I was just going to provide a bit of a narrative in the sense, just to follow up on your comments, that this was a product of consultation amongst the management group and certainly the leadership group. We met together several times to work on this. We went through very many drafts. It was produced as a result, well, in part, as you indicated – a lot of the comments that are in there, the goals, objectives, et cetera, had been in various documents before, and certainly some of the measures had been included in other documents, as some members had pointed out, such as the annual report. At the urging of this committee we decided to put it into a different format and re-evaluate what those measurements were in order to come up with

some I believe the term of art is metric so that we could evaluate the performance.

Now, as you said, Mr. Speaker, this is the first, if you will, time we've measured this, so we've set percentages and goals, et cetera. Are they realistic? Have we aimed too high? Have we aimed too low? I think we need some experience with this in order to determine that.

I will say that in the preparation of this document we looked extensively, certainly, at what the officers of the Legislature use and their business plans. We had also looked at government to make sure that we were relatively consistent, not the same but consistent, with the number of measures government departments have and the sort of measurements that they aim for, and I think we were entirely consistent with that. We looked extensively at those reports. And I must say, without going too far, that we looked at other parliaments, and we didn't find a lot of Legislatures that had, if you will, metrics. What we tried to do was develop it more, actually, in accordance with the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, which has a very good system.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that what we stress in these goals, objectives, and strategic business plan are that we are one organization. We are much more than the sum of our parts. We are not different divisions doing things; we're one organization. We wanted the measures, to the greatest extent possible, to reflect what we do as an organization, not necessarily what one group does, because we feel it's important to be viewed as that, be viewed as one organization.

I think that's enough from me. People may have reached that conclusion earlier. There you are, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Just to goal 1, "the Legislative Assembly and its committees are effective in dealing with the business of the Legislature while protecting the institution, its traditions and its privileges." You see a number of strategies and outcome measures. Are there any observations or comments with respect to goal 1?

Seeing and hearing none, goal 2:

Corporate support services for the Speaker's Office, Members, caucus staff and constituency . . . staff are provided in a timely and service focused fashion in accordance with [the] relevant Members' Services Committee . . . orders, approved policies and operating guidelines.

Again, you'll see a series of strategies that are proposed along with a number of outcome measures or metrics, using the Clerk's phrase, that reflect the support that is intended to be serving all members of the Legislature. You see a number of days that are mentioned as well as satisfaction rates. Are there any questions or comments with respect to that item?

Cortes-Vargas: I know that this is one of the elements that came forward from the motion I put forward before the budget meeting, so I just want to thank all of you for that work and thank you for what was put in place, not only in the business plan but in the budget subsequent to that. That really honoured the intention of reducing travel and finding savings within the budget. I know that this helps us all be part of a strong accountability process, that we move forward on seeing together what the LAO is working on and how those goals are reached. I know I really appreciate the work that was done, so thank you very much. Because this is a new step in our process, I wanted to acknowledge that that is increased work as well to put that in place and to put a big-picture view on a budget that is line by line.

Thank you.

10:45

The Chair:

Goal 3: The LAO is a proactive, open and accessible source for information about the . . . Assembly and the parliamentary democratic process, including being successful at creating a public understanding that the Assembly is separate and distinct from government.

Again, a number of outcome measures.

As I know the committee has known, as Speaker, with the support of the LAO staff, I've led a number of outreach strategies to the various regions of the province, and we've received considerable positive support from those visits. That's just one thread, an example of engagement and reaching out. I intend to continue to do that for the balance of the session and term. Any questions or comments with respect to this matter?

Seeing and hearing none:

The physical and information assets and parliamentary heritage are protected, providing a safe and secure environment for Members and staff.

A pretty core activity and value. Any questions with respect to that?

Goal 5: Pre-election, election and post-election protocols and practices are developed, maintained and applied in accordance with parliamentary traditions, and Members and staff receive the support that they need throughout the election process.

Seeing and hearing none, the final one:

The LAO Leadership creates through example a constructive . . . workplace culture that fosters a skilled, diverse and united workforce that feels supported, valued and proud to provide LAO public services.

Just building upon what the Clerk had said, the direction has been and will continue that this is an integrated series of staff and their silos that we create, that we work together. It is a culture that serves, that meets the demands. Some would call it customer service. I think it's far more than that. Customer service implies only an economic transaction process. This one is a much more complex and unique activity that we're involved in. I think that reflects what we all, at this committee, have discussed at various times over the last two and half years.

Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again appreciate the work in the business plan. I wonder if it might be of value with respect to goal 6. Perhaps it's unstated – well, I'm certain that it's unstated. I know that the LAO has done a lot of good work on this in the past, but I think that there's a value in actually stating it. I don't know if it's possible to include it in this year's plan or not, given that it's already before us, but I think it would be worth while to include a statement around safety and LAO staff feeling safe. I know that we've included "feels supported [and] valued and proud," but I think that given the current climate and our responsibility for doing everything that we can to ensure that there is a safe workplace for members and staff of the LAO, there could be some value in trying to add some additional comments around safety and a harassment-free workplace.

The Chair: Well, Mr. Cooper, I think there'll be at least a brief discussion on that as this committee addressed a separate policy and approved a separate policy, I believe, about a year and a half ago. We're going to just touch on a progress report on the subcommittee at the next agenda item. I think the intention – the safety issue is pretty core to what not only MLAs require but probably, in many respects more importantly, what our staff enjoy. I think that's the intention. Now, are there any specific examples that you . . .

Mr. Cooper: No. And perhaps it is said clearly enough in point 4. Perhaps the context maybe feels a little bit strange in point 4 given that it's speaking about, "the physical and information . . . and parliamentary heritage are protected," and then continues to "safe and secure environment." Perhaps given all of the other work the business plan is sufficient in its current form, and the work of the subcommittee that we will discuss at the end of the meeting – but I thought perhaps it was worth highlighting. I'm fine if we proceed.

The Chair: Thank you.

I can tell you that since arriving in the office, one of the key issues that is addressed is the safety of everyone. It's a very core aspect. I can tell you that I think you will see some of the results of that over the next year. Certainly, that is a high priority for staff and for myself.

I think, Rob, you could add to that.

Mr. Reynolds: Well, thank you, Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Cooper. Certainly, if it's a little too implicit in the policy or in the goals – it's certainly an important consideration for the Legislative Assembly Office that employees feel safe in performing their functions at work and that they feel supported. We already say "supported." We were hoping that it would come across in the vision, mission, or values statements. It could be more explicit, and when we come back, I think we could make another statement, perhaps next year. But I just want to point out that what we've done, I think, with the respectful workplace policy and the initiatives that have been undertaken with respect to that is a concrete example of how the Legislative Assembly Office is addressing the issue or the potential issue of workplace harassment by creating a process whereby those concerns can be raised. We would of course be pleased to articulate the implicit value that is expressed right now, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention the initiatives that we have taken.

Ms Scarlett may have something else to add if that's all right, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I wonder if we could maybe just defer that discussion to when we have this other matter that would come forward. I understand your point.

One of the key, core requirements in addition to the topic that you raised, Mr. Cooper, is also the basic core of physical safety and allowance for the democratic process to take place. That is a very core aspect that we do not take lightly, and we will continue to not sacrifice any resources in that regard. You can continue to see that on a go-forward basis, and I know that all of you expect and support that direction.

Are there any – Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: I'm looking under goal 3 here and outcome measures. Visitors that attended a special event: 120,000. A special event is, like, anything outside of the leg. sitting itself? Is that what that is?

10:55

The Chair: Mr. Hodgson.

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. Brian Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms and director of visitor, ceremonial, and security services. Broadly speaking, yes. A special event would include Canada Day and Family Day and Celebrate the Season and other special events as examples of special events.

Mr. McIver: All right. Okay. I presume that the 120,000 is a target to get up to and not to restrict access to, right?

Mr. Hodgson: Absolutely. Yeah. We're in the growth business.

Mr. McIver: All right. No. That's fine. Then I'll suggest, I suppose, not that gently but, I hope, a little bit gently that we missed an opportunity this week when we didn't fill the gallery when we swore in the Leader of the Official Opposition. The galleries were empty, and they could have been full. But perhaps in the future we could not miss those opportunities.

The Chair: Mr. McIver, I would just point out that I made that decision, not staff. That was based upon – we have a conversation around this table on a continuous basis about precedent. We can discuss it later if you wish, but that was the overarching reason. It was a very successful and very professional ceremony, I believe.

Mr. McIver: It was good.

The Chair: You had another question?

Mr. McIver: No, no. That was my question. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments?

I'd just suggest that we move to the budget, Mr. Clerk.

In addition to the outreach, I want to just signal – and I've mentioned it maybe a few times at the table, but I think you may see me raising that for further discussion. The Clerk and I had an opportunity to be meeting with the Speakers across the country last week. Ms Jabbour was with us as well. I want to signal that I hope that this committee and this Legislature – it certainly won't be completed in any way, but I've raised it before, and I do think we need to move it higher on the agenda. The accessibility of our Legislature as well as the cluster of activity in that very small security space need some attention. That may well, in the future, cost some money, but it's the institution, the centre of democracy for this province. Access and engagement, all of these principles and values that we talk about: ensure that that includes everyone. So I'm just signalling to you that you can expect that that issue is going to come forward and that we need to be making, I believe, some changes for the future. But that's one of the issues that I will be addressing.

To the budget, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe you're all at the appropriate points in the budget. I mean, if you turn to the estimates summary, that may be the most, as it were, easy-to-follow document.

First, I'd like to thank the LAO staff who worked on the 2018-19 estimates. In preparation for this we've gone through – just to let you know, I think we're on draft eight or nine right now. We've been working quite diligently on this project for a while. I want to tell you that we've followed the parameters and applied the parameters consistently, those parameters that you agreed to as a committee, I believe, on November 8, 2017.

As a result of that, I'd like to point out a few key elements in this year's budget. Now, we committed to and we have striven to find areas where savings could be attained, and we've paid very close attention to the hosting and travel components, as was requested when you met in November. So I'm pleased to report that the LAO is requesting \$1,018,384 less than last year.

We have reduced the hosting and travel components by a minimum of 10 per cent compared to last year's budget. We have reduced travel by \$77,000 and \$21,000 in hosting. We've achieved significant cuts in that. You have to understand that our budget for hosting wasn't actually that large. I have to tell you that in going through the budget, the minimum number you can have for a budget area is \$1,000, and quite often it was \$1,000 for a division's hosting.

So it was, like: okay; do you get rid of everything or keep it the same? We managed to pare it back for that.

Now, as we mentioned in the parameters discussion, one of the key items in this coming fiscal year is election preparedness. Conceivably, under the legislation the election could take place in this coming fiscal year, but whether it does or whether it's the next fiscal year, essentially the preparation for that starts before because we have to get prepared. We need to work on things like a new website, the dissolution guidelines, ensuring that there are preparations for the party members, for new members, returning members. We have a lot of work to do. This is really one of the busiest times. What we said at the parameters meeting was that in order to accomplish this, we will need a contingency amount, what has been estimated as \$250,000. That's taken from what was the Electoral Boundaries Commission budget. We've reduced the amount in that area by \$434,000 because the boundaries commission doesn't exist anymore, but we believe this is a consistent purpose.

You will also look at the planning and redevelopment initiatives, which are at the same amount as last year. This is for the continuous improvement of services provided to members and their staff. There is no increase from last year. We can run through the list of the projects, the IT projects, the projects with respect to servicing members in the performance of their duties.

In essence, just to summarize, the LAO is seeking your approval for the 2018-19 fiscal year for a budget amount of \$67,639,000.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my remarks.

The Chair: Let me just summarize before I recognize others. I, too, would like to compliment the staff. There has been an inordinate amount of time put into this, and the efficiencies continue to be found. As we all know, in this, quote, business that we're in, it's not always possible to estimate, for example, how much time 87 people want to spend with each other in the Assembly, so it's a bit of an art.

Member Cortes-Vargas, then Mr. Cooper, then Mr. Nixon.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just, actually, curious about what was budgeted for election preparedness last time, like, how it compares to what it was in the previous election. I know it was a snap election, so I don't know if that impacts what was budgeted.

11:05

Mr. Reynolds: You know, just to follow up on that point before I ask Cheryl and Darren to intervene, it was a snap election – it wasn't in the normal process – and I think it's safe to say that we didn't anticipate the number of new members that actually were elected. I mean, the new members weren't restricted to the government members' caucus. There were a number of new members in the opposition as well.

I think that what we found over the months is that there were a number of changes that went along with that, and it seemed, in what we've picked up, that members may not have internalized all the information that we had thought might be there or that we didn't provide it in a manner sufficient to be internalized. So, essentially, what we want to do, the objective before we get to the numbers, is to make sure that we're able to provide members with the most user-friendly information after the election so that they can perform their functions.

The Chair: The Clerk is being very courteous when he uses the phrase "internalized." Retaining and learning a whole lot of information in a short period of time was more to our limitations rather than the intentions of the staff.

Cheryl, go ahead.

Ms Scarlett: Just to supplement. As was mentioned, in the last election there was not a line item for that. In the previous election, in and around the 2012 period, there was a budget line in there. I'm sorry. I don't have those exact amounts, but I do know that it paralleled what we're presenting. In the areas of those support services – as an example, the HR, the IT, the financial management – and in terms of assisting directly the front-line folks, assisting outgoing and incoming members and the corresponding staff that go with them, there are significant increases in volume in terms of assisting all those that are leaving but also at the same time assisting all of the incoming members and helping them get going in their operation and with their staff. So it is a similar model to what we have planned for in previous elections in my time here.

The amount that was in 2012 actually was significantly greater, but at that time there were four new members being added as well, increased from 83 to 87, so there were additional amounts of monies flagged in that budget to accommodate the actual set-up and costs related to four new members.

The Chair: Mr. McIver, I think.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I've just got a question if you don't mind.

The Chair: Oh. Mr. Cooper. I think I had him first.

Mr. McIver: Of course.

The Chair: He pointed that out to me.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I appreciate all of the good work done on the budget and the desire of the LAO to assist in the fiscal restraint that we need to see. You know, we all have a part to play in doing that part.

With that said, I just wanted to double-check on something that I know is of significant importance to all members of the Assembly. In the Parliamentary Counsel budget under the line item for books I'm just curious to know if Parliamentary Counsel has taken into consideration the very exciting and important release of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* third edition book, that was just released on Wednesday, I believe, of this week. I'm sure that many members are waiting with bated breath on this. I'm curious to know, inside the confines of this very restricted budget, if you're going to be able to manage to ensure that House leaders and other key folks in the Chamber will be able to be resourced appropriately with the release of the new book.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you. If I might, Mr. Chair. Yes, for some of us that's exciting news. If I might, we've been on the e-mail, as I like to call it, this morning trying to determine the availability of copies and getting pricing information, so we're on it, as it were. I'm not entirely sure how soon we will get it. We've contacted, I believe, the publisher, Yvon Blais, to determine when the copies will be available and, as I said, the price, so we're certainly on it. You're quite right, Mr. Cooper. We hadn't voted a specific amount to it, but we will certainly try to find that within our existing budget.

The Chair: And, Mr. Cooper, once we do find that, there will be another edition in your constituency office. You'll have a number of doorstops that you can use.

Mr. Cooper: The old ones are still good. I can assure you of that.

The Chair: I think we have Mr. McIver – sorry. Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: I'm happy to be confused with my good friend Mr. McIver. I do have a little bit more hair than him still, but not for long, I guess.

First off, Mr. Clerk, let me thank you for bringing in a budget, through the Speaker to you, that is very fiscally responsible. I hope that our government of the day will follow your lead though I will not hold my breath on that. I have a couple of quick questions on it, though. Actually, I'd also like to point out that I do think that the Official Opposition did their part in helping to accomplish that by merging our two great legacy parties together and reducing the cost.

My question on election preparedness. First off, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Clerk: are there any other expenses for the boundaries commission that would be anticipated for the budget, or is that something that would all move over to the Chief Electoral Officer now as far as the adjustments as a result of that passing in the Legislature?

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you. If I may, Mr. Chair. There are no expenditures per se from the commission. There are some expenses that we might incur with respect to shifting around constituency calculations, you know, changing signs. I mean, they're ones that constituencies and the LAO would incur in the sense of new signs, new maps, adjusting riding names, et cetera. Frankly, I haven't quantified that, but that would be part of the amount because, of course, the new boundaries wouldn't take effect until the election was called. But we have preparatory work beforehand, so there is a cost element to the fallout from the commission. Frankly, it's a bit hard to determine, but there is definitely a cost element.

Mr. Nixon: I like the word you used, "fallout." That's an interesting choice of words, Mr. Clerk.

With that said, it's my understanding that what you're saying is that most of that would probably be after the next election, a large amount of that cost to the LAO as far as signs re members. You know, there's a bunch of stuff that has to be changed, obviously, with the names and all that, but the bulk of that cost you seem to be anticipating postelection.

Mr. Reynolds: It would certainly take effect postelection, well, post election call, because once the election is called, the new boundaries kick in. So if the election is held in March 2019, those costs would be incurred in the fiscal year that we're looking at right now. You know, a lot of the costs involved, frankly, in this matter for election preparedness, election, and then follow-up, I mean, are really training of members and assisting with the transition of members who are no longer going to be serving, so there are costs involved in that. Now, this money is in here. As I said, we can't predict when the election will be called. Obviously, if it's not used, it would be returned, and we would budget a similar amount for the following fiscal year, so 2019-2020.

11:15

Mr. Nixon: You've answered my question, Mr. Clerk.

I have one more, so I'll just ask it now, Mr. Speaker. In that way, you don't have to come back to me.

With that great work you've done keeping the budget under control, is there something, Mr. Clerk, that you or your team are concerned about, you know, that you had to cut in order to try to accomplish the budget numbers that you've brought here today?

Mr. Reynolds: What concerns me about that?

Mr. Nixon: Well, is there something that you are concerned about or feel that you had to adjust in order to come in with that, you

know, \$1 million and whatever number? I don't have it right here in front of me now; I'm sorry, Rob. Is there something that you guys are concerned about that you are seeing disappear or that you think may be needed but you've had to deal with in a certain way to get us to this point?

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you very much. That's a very interesting question, and I only wish I'd thought of it before so that I could provide you with a coherent answer. To look at your question another way, really, from what we were looking at when we were budgeting, my personal view and that of the leadership team is that the last place we go to is – we don't want to cut employees. I think that we're very pleased that we don't have to do that in this budget.

I think the regret, if there is a regret, is that we may not be able to, as it were, take advantage of professional development opportunities that may exist. But having said that, we recognize that this is part of the fiscal position of the province, and we are more than willing, more than happy to share the burden, if there is a burden, and the provincial responsibilities. We are not special in that regard.

Mr. Nixon: So you would say that you were able to achieve some fiscal savings on behalf of the taxpayer without cutting a lot of front-line jobs. I would commend you on that. Thank you for showing that it's possible, and hopefully some government members are paying attention to that.

Thanks, Mr. Clerk. Thanks, Mr. Speaker, for my time.

The Chair: It was pointed out to me that I may have jumped over a couple of individuals.

Member Cortes-Vargas, did you have a question?

Mr. McIver: I'll wait my turn.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. I'm really looking forward to what you have to say, Mr. McIver.

You know what? I think there's a little bit of teasing happening, but I really, really appreciate the work that has been done, that follows the parameters that this committee set out when we were talking about cutting the cookies. You know, that's where the discussion started, and it got explained about cutting some of the hosting fees that we have. I know that it's been done in a more rounded way throughout the budgets, so we appreciate that, and I know that it's taken the leadership of the entire committee in order to do so.

I do have a question about part of the parameters that were set out within the budget, which comes to the wage freeze. My understanding is that the Alberta public service does have the wage freeze continuing throughout this fiscal year. In the way it was worded, it just said that the current wage freeze is expiring March 31 and that there's no further direction received from the Alberta public service, but from what I'm aware of, the wage freeze is continuing throughout the fiscal year. So I just want to confirm that that is, in fact, the case and that the budget has been made with the wage freeze continuing.

Ms Scarlett: That is correct. Since the time the parameters were first developed and presented, there has been an update relative to direction. There continues to be the freeze, and everything that you're seeing in the budget was prepared based on that parameter, no increase.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Pitt.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I have some questions in regard to visitor services, which is the largest decrease in the budget. There are some human resource changes by 6.26 per cent and some postage, office equipment rentals and that type of thing, other labour and services, a hosting decrease, and office admin/supplies. What is that? What's in there?

Mr. Reynolds: If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'll ask Brian Hodgson and Al Chapman to tag team it, so to speak. But I can tell you that included in the budget this current fiscal year was an amount for Canada 150. What had happened was that we had budgeted I believe the figure was \$196,000 for that. Now, a large amount of that was provided by a grant from the federal government that flowed through the city of Edmonton. There was an amount of \$196,000, let's say, that was budgeted, so we've reduced that. We're not celebrating Canada 150 again, so that's a large part of the reduction in visitor services. Now, having said that, we're not getting the projected offsetting revenue either – right? – so it's a bit of a wash.

Mr. Chair, if it's fine, I'll let Brian and Al follow up on that.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you.

Mr. Hodgson: I don't know if there's anything further to follow up on that, Mr. Chair. I mean, that's the succinct and complete explanation of the major part of that difference.

Al, do you want to add to that?

Mr. Chapman: The only other piece to add would be around the hosting. I think that was the last part of the question.

Mrs. Pitt: Yes.

Mr. Chapman: There was a significant decrease, and it mainly came from Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day, the hosting of students. We're doing some re-evaluating of the program and making some changes based on that reduction, that was asked about. What has the largest impact, I'd say, on public programming is that piece.

Mrs. Pitt: Is that removing the MLA for a Day program or just changing the way it operates?

Mr. Hodgson: No. Reducing the expenditure that we incur.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. How are you doing that?

Mr. Hodgson: Through adjusting the hosting component and reducing some aspects of that in the program, which will not affect the program content per se.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. So the MLA for a Day program is still on?

Mr. Hodgson: It's still on, absolutely.

Mrs. Pitt: It will still operate. Okay.

Mr. Hodgson: Date to be determined, incidentally.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. I guess, while you're here, in follow-up to a question that my colleague Mr. Nixon had in regard to sort of the overall budget and any challenges that you may be facing, is there any level of service that will not be met, or are there any additional challenges that you're facing given the circumstances?

Mr. Hodgson: Well, I think the visitorship to the site here is up 24.6 per cent over last year, so that's a significant increase in visitors here. We're involved and engaged in public education and

outreach. To the extent that we're able to provide the visitor experience with the existing resources, I think that will be increasingly a challenge if we continue to show that level of growth. I have to say that I commend the visitor services staff for all the good work that they do, in partnership with others, to increase that. It's a tremendous achievement, it seems to me. There's a finite amount of throughput that we could accommodate on the site with existing staff, so if we continue to show growth, there's going to be pressure on the staff and on the resources that we have to meet those demands.

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. Absolutely. I'll just say to visitor services that I think all of us here can agree that you guys do a really great job, especially in engaging the students that come to visit. The MLA for a Day program is fantastic. I'm glad to see those things move forward. Thank you for that information.

I think that's pretty much all I have. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you. We all know this as MLAs. Those are very knowledgeable, capable, and very courteous people that are welcoming our people to this place, and they do an excellent job.

Just for the record I missed Mr. McIver on the list. I'm not deliberately overlooking you. I would never want to do that.

Mr. McIver: I'm happy to wait my turn, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I believe the moment has arrived. Mr. McIver.

11:25

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thank you. I'll try not to disappoint.

Now, are we going to put a restaurant at any point into the Federal building? There's space set aside for it, and that actually could be a revenue source, which could help with the budget.

The Chair: Would you like to make a motion on that, if I could add a little humour? Staff can speak with more detail.

Mr. McIver: Did I pick a scab, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Staff can add to it. It's my understanding that that jurisdiction is largely under the Infrastructure ministry.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is largely under Infrastructure to determine that. I'll let Shannon or Brian talk about that. I mean, there's a bit of a history going forward. If you're asking if there's money budgeted in this budget for the provision of a restaurant, no, there certainly isn't.

Mr. McIver: I would expect that it would be a cash-positive thing if a restaurateur were to come in, put equipment in, and pay a lease. I'm not sure that that needs to be an expense.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. McIver, I haven't looked at it in any detail. I'm not sure that's necessarily the experience of those who've been involved in providing restaurant services around the precincts. But I'll let Shannon or Brian speak to that.

Mr. Hodgson: Well, Mr. Chairman, the issue of restaurants, of course, antedates the occupation of this building. As you know, there was a concept that would have seen, basically, a takeaway cafeteria and a so-called fine-dining facility. I think the economics of both of those proposed uses in the space here have changed over time. You know, as the Clerk has pointed out, it really is an Infrastructure situation. I would say this, though, that the position that, certainly, we have taken is in support of some sort of a facility in this building based on our assessment of what the needs are. But

we're not directly involved in that. Certainly, we've had ongoing discussions to try and encourage the use of that space along the lines that you have suggested, but again that's an Infrastructure . . .

Mr. McIver: Okay. All right. I'm off topic, and I apologize for that, and I don't mind being reminded.

Questions, though, or comments. I see that FTEs have gone down from a total of 407 down to 396 and a half, so about 10 or 11 FTEs. Is that a real reduction in full-time equivalent staff, or is it a gap in hiring where we expect to have positions empty that would otherwise be full?

Ms Scarlett: One of the variances that you see on that report takes and breaks down the FTEs as they relate to the staff that work under the Clerk. In addition, you have the staff that work in the caucuses and the staff that work in the constituency offices. Those staff that work in the caucuses and the constituency offices: that's at a point in time. I think you are aware that in many cases, particularly in the constituency offices, members choose to have more than one employee, but they're working more part-time. So it's the estimate of the FTEs. However, it is at a point in time, and there is some variance in any given month. As well, there is some variance within the LAO from time to time as it relates to sessional employees and peak times.

Mr. McIver: Okay. All right. Now, I'd just note – I've got the page open here – that on page 1 the estimated budget in '16-17 was \$69 million and \$64 million spent. The estimated budget this year is \$68 million, about three-quarters of a million less, roughly, and \$64 million spent. This next year, which you're proposing here, as I understand it, has an estimated budget of \$67 million, so the estimated budget is falling by a million a year. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all your staff for making the efforts to restrain yourselves in a responsible way, and I'm grateful for that.

So there are a few variances, but the one – and to be clear with you, this isn't a criticism, but it's a for-real question. Moving to page 2 of 9, human resource expenses, I'm looking right at the top line number, where the estimated expenditures for '16-17, '17-18, and '18-19, in all three cases, are \$420,000, but the actuals went from \$379,000 to \$241,000 in '17-18. I'm just, again, curious on the earnings for management. We'd dropped from \$379,000 to \$241,000. Is that a matter of a real reduction in management staff, or is it positions that are empty that need to be filled? Or is there something else that I don't understand? There's a world of things I don't understand, so I'm asking.

The Chair: I'll let Cheryl Scarlett speak to the matter.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. Within that particular budget that you're looking at, in that particular case there are some vacancies. That's why you're showing, in a particular year, that monies were not spent: a combination of vacancies, some requested leaves without pay, those types of things. In other scenarios, when you have slight variances in manpower, talking generically, it could be that you had somebody leave, and there is a period of time where you have that vacancy before you are able to fill it again. In the manpower those are some common examples of why you would have some variances.

Mr. McIver: Okay. That's earnings management. There are no management areas that are left wanting, nothing that's not being looked after, based on what you just said? I'm just asking. This isn't a criticism. I'm just asking.

Mr. Reynolds: Well, you know, you look at the amount, and you appreciate that it's not a huge organization like FMAS. I feel a little

constrained because by getting into detail, we're talking about individual employees, and I don't . . .

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I don't want to drag anybody's individual circumstance through this committee.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. Well, no. As Cheryl indicated, there are incidents where there are positions that can be filled. We're not asking for an increased number of FTEs. It really relates more to filling those positions.

Mr. McIver: I'll talk to you offline, if that's . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah.

Mr. McIver: Or not. Either way. You've answered my question, and I'm grateful for that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I'll just add to that. First of all, taking a step back to the cafeteria issue, I need to underline that I hope the Assembly might look at that. I can tell you that in my experience of the three or four other Legislatures that were visited, they have much, much better, higher level kinds of aesthetics than does ours in our building, but I know that's a part of just some of the austerity measures that we all need to share.

Mr. McIver: A Tim Hortons would make me happy, and it'd make me happier if they actually paid rent and actually reduced the expenditures by paying rent, but I won't – that's all I need to say.

The Chair: Yeah. At this juncture it's not our mandate to do that.

The other thing is that part of the overall review, some of those items that were discussed here: the Clerk is looking at how we get the most value. Back to the point he made at the outset, some of those new directions include moving as one team, and I think that's what you're beginning to see here in terms of some shifting resources. Nonetheless, we stay within the efficiency guidelines that the committee asked us to do.

Mr. McIver: Well, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, you should be very proud of the professional work done by all of your staff.

The Chair: As I am. You know what? All of you in here plus all of our other peers: I would hope that whenever you get the chance to compliment about that, you do that.

Are there any other questions, items with respect to the strategic plan and budget that you would like to ask, or are we ready . . .

11:35

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. Just before we move ahead, I just want to reassure you, in furtherance of the motion that was passed earlier at this meeting, that the amounts that are there for the caucuses do not reflect a change. They follow the motion and reflect the same amounts with all necessary modifications, in the sense that if a caucus has grown since the last budget, that would be reflected. So we've anticipated what might occur, and that's how we've moved forward, in case anyone had a question about that.

The Chair: I'm sensing that there is agreement on the budget, and I'm wondering if anyone is prepared to move a motion that the Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2018-19 legislative – oh.

Cortes-Vargas: Sorry. I do have a question. In ceremonial and security services there was a reduction of one conference. The

reason I mention it is because the conference in itself, when I looked up the mandate as to what it was, was around the training for security staff around being able to address sexual assaults in the workplace and things of that nature. I just wanted to ask for more details about why that one was selected as a conference to not go to.

Mr. Hodgson: I'm not sure what conference you're . . .

Cortes-Vargas: Sorry. Just give me a second.

The Chair: What page are you on?

Mr. Hodgson: All right. Okay. Well, I presume, then, that you're referring to the Canadian Association of Threat Assessment Professionals.

Cortes-Vargas: Yes.

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. Well, we had to make certain economies in our travel budget, and that was one of a number of conferences that we're not going to attend. That conference did not specifically deal with sexual assaults. It could be a part of the conference. I've been to it once, and it does in part deal with family-related violence but not exclusively.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay.

The Chair: Are there any other questions with respect to the budget? Is someone prepared to move approval of the budget in the amount of \$67,639,000, which is a reduction from last year? Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Yeah. I so move.

The Chair: Any further questions, discussion?

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

I think we are nearing completion. Let me just give a little preamble to the next matter. As we discussed earlier, we passed in this committee – we have been pleased that we have a policy in place for the LAO with respect to harassment. Members will also remember that this committee approved a subcommittee formation, which was chaired by Ms Jabbour, on the matter, which was discussed again in earlier meetings, I think, in the 2015-2016 year, about the need for a policy of member to member. There have been a series of meetings over the last year.

I'd just ask Ms Jabbour to sort of advise this committee – I know it's a high priority – what the status is of the matter and when it might be. Debbie.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to this committee, we have had a number of meetings and determined that, yes, absolutely, we do need a policy for member to member. Our most recent status of it: as of October 2017 we had made the decision as a committee that we would try to build on existing policies for the LAO and use that as sort of the base but add a number of factors that were considered unique to MLAs themselves. As of October 2017 a draft policy was prepared by staff and the committee, and then this policy – the decision was made to then go out and discuss the matter with our individual caucuses and our colleagues to get feedback, if there was anything that we had missed or anything requiring changes. Basically, that's kind of where things are at, that we're at that stage of gathering that important feedback.

Personally I've also had the opportunity to gather feedback from colleagues across other provinces, across Canada just to get a sense

of where they're at with this matter because it's certainly something that we all face. It's a fairly new concept, trying to do a policy for MLA to MLA, but we've recognized that it is extremely important that we have something and that we take the time to ensure that we do it right.

We're in the process of gathering that information so that we can finally do a policy to hopefully present at an upcoming Members' Services Committee once we've got something that we feel covers all the bases.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm proud and pleased to say that this committee, this Legislature have been out in front on this issue. I recognize that it's received some considerable public dialogue, particularly in the last week or months, but it's very clear that a member-to-member policy is important for us. I'm glad that this committee has supported it, and we can bring it back as quickly as we can and ensure that no individual, no employee, no elected official is ever allowed to experience unwelcome comments or actions without due process and protection. I know that all of you at this table, all parties, all caucuses have supported that intent, and I'm proud that we can be a leader on this issue.

Ms Jabbour: If I could just add to reinforce that. We do have already all of these other policies. We've got the staff policy towards members. The only piece that we still are working on is the actual MLA-to-MLA, the peer policy portion of it, and that is the piece that we still need to go forward on.

The Chair: In fact, that particular earlier one was in this committee about, I think, early 2016. So it will be a priority. I know that the human resources have really addressed this issue in many, many staff meetings, et cetera, and that will continue.

Are there any other questions, comments? Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. As a member of the subcommittee I'd just like to thank everyone for their work. I'd also like to thank the LAO for some of their good work around some of the training that they've been providing. I know that the UCP caucus took advantage of some of the policy training a couple of weeks ago now, I guess. I don't remember the exact timeline, but I think it was two or three weeks ago that we invited the LAO to come and train all of our team so that they were well aware of the policies that were in place and to ensure that we can do everything we can to ensure that our workplace is as safe and respectful as possible and that we can be responsible in trying to do everything we can to help assist in that as I know that it's a priority for all of us and, particularly, members of our team. So thank you to the LAO for assisting in that. I think there's some important work that has been done, and I think that there's a lot of very important work ahead of us as well on this as we all move forward together.

11:45

The Chair: Yes. Thank you. Let me just echo that. We need to work together on this stuff.

Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Motion to adjourn.

The Chair: So it looks like we've set it up. We achieved our target together. We got there before noon. Having heard the motion to adjourn, all in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Motion is carried.

[The committee adjourned at 11:46 a.m.]

