



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Thursday, June 21, 2018
10:30 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

Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)*
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)**
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)

* substitution for Erin Babcock

** substitution for Cameron Westhead

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
Paul Link	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
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
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

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

Before we get started with our business, I'd ask members and those joining the committee to introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call on the members via teleconference to introduce themselves. Who'd like to start? Mr. Clerk.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Link: Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms.

Mr. Carson: Good morning. Jon Carson, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

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

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

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: I'm Bob Wanner, the MLA for Medicine Hat.

I will go, then, to our teleconference members. Who'd like to start?

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

The Chair: I am not at all surprised that you would be the first person to say your name, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: First in, best dressed.

Mr. Clark: Greg Clark from the even better constituency of Calgary-Elbow.

The Chair: Excellent.

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

Mrs. Pitt: Angela Pitt, MLA for Airdrie.

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver from the visionary constituency of Calgary-Hays.

Ms Payne: Good morning. Brandy Payne from the amazing constituency of Calgary-Acadia.

The Chair: The benchmark is moving up.

Who's after that?

Drever: Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow, which is the best constituency.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: MLA Cortes-Vargas, Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I'm the deputy chair.

The Chair: That's who I was looking for.

The meeting agenda and briefing notes were posted to the committee's internal website. We didn't quite make our seven-day target, which we aim for, but that was as a result of some subcommittee meetings, et cetera. If anyone requires copies, please let the committee clerk know.

The microphone consoles are operated by *Hansard* staff. Keep mobile devices on silent for the duration of our meeting. Audio and video of committee proceedings are streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio and video access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

The agenda has been distributed. Are there any additions or changes to the agenda?

If not, would a member move adoption of our meeting agenda? Mr. Carson. All in favour, please say aye. You know what? I'm going to take the shortcut next time on the vote. If anybody is opposed, we'll deal with that. The motion is carried.

You should have a copy of the minutes of February 1. Are there any errors or omissions to note? Let me take a quick look at mine.

For those that were not at the meeting – I suffer from this practice occasionally in the House; I neglect to ask – are all those people in favour of the motion we just passed? I heard all in favour. The motion is carried.

Would someone like to move that the minutes of February 1 be approved? Mr. Dang. All in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed? The motion is carried.

Under Subcommittee to Review the Members' Services Committee Orders: recommendations of the subcommittee, draft amendments and implementation dates. As noted in the minutes that we just adopted, the subcommittee was directed to provide draft amendments to the orders and implementation dates following the recommendations in its interim report, which this committee received at its February 1, 2018, meeting.

Members should have the letter dated June 15, 2018, from Mr. Dang to myself. I will turn it over to Mr. Dang to provide an overview of the draft amendments and implementation dates. Thomas.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I think the subcommittee has been diligently working away since the last interim report, and today we've come back with another interim report, with six primary recommendations here. I'll just go through them in order, and perhaps at the end I'll pause for questions.

The first draft recommendation we've made is an amendment to the administrative services order. One housekeeping item is to change the name of the orders, but primarily the substantive changes are for the use of credit cards in the constituency office by staff members and by members. These cards could be used for allowable constituency office expenses, so think things like your day-to-day operational, stationery in your office, and whatnot. We're proposing a card limit of \$2,000 per card, with transactions such as cash withdrawals or liquor purchases not being permitted, and we're recommending that these cards be issued in the staffperson's name, with the member responsible for misuse. Credit cards would also be suspended December 1 of the year preceding a general election, which is to be called under the Election Act. So

this year December 1 would be the last day that it could be used. The implementation date we're recommending is July 1 of this year.

The second amendment we're recommending is an amendment to the constituency services order, and this one is around items that are partisan materials and definitions for partisan activities and partisan materials. I think that some of these are relatively straightforward. We're just trying to clarify for members and for their staff what are allowable and not allowable expenses in terms of things like colours or what type of language should be used. We're just making very clear definitions of these items.

The third item is the members' allowances amendment order, which is a requirement for a temporary residence declaration. Both of these are being recommended to be implemented on passage here, and this is just an additional piece of documentation that members would have to provide to ensure that there wasn't any misuse of a temporary residence accommodation.

The fourth item that we're bringing forward is the third-party allowances and expenses and transportation amendment order. This one is more of a cleanup. This one is a consolidation and clarification as to who guests can be when they're travelling, so it includes things like changing the language around spouses or gendered language and just consolidating it so that reasonable living and travelling expenses may be paid to or on behalf of a member's guest, essentially, who joins them. That's something that we're hoping we'll be able to clarify, some of those confusions around when you're allowed to bring a guest with you and when not and who that guest may be.

10:40

The fifth item is the transportation amendment order, and this one is an order that allows members to transfer up to 10 per cent of their mileage/kilometre allowance to constituency staff for travel as part of that employee's normal duties in the constituency. Right now urban MLAs, I believe, are allowed 30,000 kilometres, and rural MLAs are allowed I believe it's 80,000 or 85,000 kilometres. So up to 10 per cent of that limit you'd be able to transfer to your staff to use as part of their reimbursement for their travel.

Finally, the last change is a change to the constituency services order, which is a framework and more clarity around what are allowable or not allowable event ticket expenses. We felt that it was important to provide a stand-alone provision relating to events, because it has been an issue of confusion for some members and their staff, and what constitutes something that may be reimbursed. We determined that things like NHL or CFL games or professional sports games were clearly not allowable and that taxpayers shouldn't be paying for that. Things like golf fees would not be allowable, or any portion of a ticket that is a charitable donation should not be allowable. We also used the normal "no alcohol being allowed" under this expense as well. Those types of things would be restricted.

We also decided that we believe that transparency is one of the most important things in government, so any event ticket that was valued at greater than \$100 must be disclosed.

All of those last few items we recommend to be implemented on passage with the exception of the credit card one, which has a date of July 1.

If there are any questions, I'd be happy to take them at this time.

The Chair: Okay. I think we'll deal with it at a macro level here, speaking to the points individually, and then I think that we most probably should pass individual motions for each of the proposed changes if you are agreeable to that.

To the members, are there any questions, comments? If you would identify who you are at the outset, please do so. Do I

understand that there are no questions or comments from the committee about the subcommittee's review of the Members' Services Committee orders?

Mr. Cooper: It's Nathan Cooper.

The Chair: Hi, Nathan. Go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: I would just say that, broadly speaking, as someone who attended a couple of the subcommittee meetings, I was pleased with the work that the subcommittee did. I don't think that we have universal agreement, but generally speaking, the work has been well received by members of our caucus, and I don't think that we have significant portions of discussion for this morning's meeting.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, if I may.

The Chair: Thomas, go ahead.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank all the members of the subcommittee and members who substituted on the subcommittee for the hard work they did. I think we've done some really great work here.

Seeing as there is no discussion on the points, is it possible that I could perhaps recommend or move a motion, if Parliamentary Counsel would assist me, to accept the interim report as one package so that we don't have to vote on each individual item and to just accept it along with all the recommended implementation dates?

The Chair: I've been advised that that would be inappropriate given the circumstances. You have to give the long speech, not the short one.

Mr. Dang: Well, I went for a try.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments?

If not, I would ask Mr. Dang, I presume, for the first proposal, the administrative services amendment order.

Mr. Dang: Yes.

The Chair: Could you make that into a motion?

Mr. Dang: I would like to put that into a motion. I would move that the Standing Committee on Members' Services – sorry, I'm just looking for that – approve the draft order for the administrative services amendment order. Someone will clean that up a little bit.

The Chair: Maybe we'll get Karen just for the record to read that. She can do the next ones as well, as long as there's a consensus.

Go ahead, Karen.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Moved by Mr. Dang that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed administrative services amendment order as distributed.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed?

The motion is carried.

The constituency services amendment order: Karen, if you would read that for the record as well. This is respecting constituency communications, accepting recommendation 2 under section 3.5,

which was not adopted by the committee. Do members have any questions related to this proposed amendment?

You will move it?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I would move that the Members' Services Committee approve the revised Members' Services Committee orders as distributed.

The Chair: Constituency services amendment order.

Mr. Dang: The constituency services amendment order.

I move that

the Members' Services Committee approve the constituency services amendment order as distributed.

The Chair: Having heard Mr. Dang make the motion, all in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed?

The motion is carried.

We will now move to the members' allowances amendment order. I would ask that maybe Karen read the resolution.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, I have it here.

The Chair: Oh. We're okay?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. I would move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed members' allowances amendment order as distributed.

The Chair: Any questions, comments?

All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Are there any members opposed?

The motion is carried.

The third-party allowances and expenses and transportation amendment order: are there any questions or comments to Mr. Dang with respect to that matter?

Hearing none, Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, I would move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed third-party allowances and expenses and transportation amendment order as distributed.

The Chair: All those in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed?

The motion is carried.

The transportation amendment order, which deals with travel expenses by constituency assistants: are there any questions related to the proposed order?

Hearing none, Mr. Dang.

10:50

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed transportation amendment order as distributed.

The Chair: All in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed?

The motion is carried.

Next is the event expenses draft order. The issue of event tickets was not addressed in the subcommittee's interim report but has been considered by the subcommittee during its recent meetings, as noted by Mr. Dang in his earlier comments. Are there any questions respecting this draft amendment?

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed constituency services amendment order as distributed.

The Chair: All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Anyone opposed?

The motion is carried.

I should have mentioned at the outset that there is another matter, as an information item, that I would ask the Clerk and staff to speak to. We might need another discussion at a later date, but maybe, Mr. Clerk, I'll leave it at that. The matter is the dissolution guidelines.

Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly won't take up much time here. It's just normal in the life of a Legislature that at this stage we start to prepare dissolution guidelines to send around to members. Quite frankly, with so many people who haven't gone through this before, in the sense of, you know, being a member and going into an election, we thought it might be useful to provide you with this information at an early date just so that you and your constituency staff are on track for what would happen when the Legislature dissolves, which isn't, of course, going to happen for quite a while. Under the Election Act it has to be held between March 1 and May 31, 2019. In any event, it was raised at the constituency office seminar held in Calgary in May, so we are just saying that the Speaker may be sending you something on the dissolution guidelines in the near future.

Cheryl, did you have anything that you wish to add?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: So, yes, you will be getting a memo from me. I'd encourage all of us to read it and also draw it to the attention of our staff.

I would like to also suggest that we have a meeting in late August or early September. The subcommittee on respectful workplace policies may have completed its work by that time and, I hope, would be ready to make a report to this committee. What is the availability? Rather than trying to discuss that now, Karen will do an availability search for everyone. But I think that in terms of just considering your own personal schedules, keep conscious that we will probably need a meeting, most probably in late August, maybe in early September.

Mr. Clerk, Karen, members, are there any other issues that we need to or may wish to discuss here today?

Seeing and hearing none, would anyone be prepared to move a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Dang: I would so move.

The Chair: Mr. Dang, you make the day complete.

All those in favour of the motion to adjourn, please say aye. Anyone opposed? Mr. Cooper must be out sitting under the shade of a tree.

Mr. Cooper: That was the best 26 minutes of my life.

The Chair: The motion is passed, and the meeting stands adjourned.

Thank you, everyone. Have a good summer.

[The committee adjourned at 10:56 a.m.]

