



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Thursday, October 25, 2018
9:01 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)
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)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)

Also in Attendance

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (FCP)

Support Staff

Jessica Dion	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Alex McCuaig	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk, Executive Director of House Services, and Acting Clerk, Procedure
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Brian G. Hodgson	Sergeant-at-Arms
Cheryl Scarlett	Executive Director of Corporate Services and Acting Clerk, Administration
Darren Joy	Manager of Financial Services and Senior Financial Officer
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

9:01 a.m. **Thursday, October 25, 2018**

[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

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

Before we get started, I'd ask that the members and those joining us at the table introduce themselves for the record, and I will then call on members joining the meeting via teleconference to introduce themselves.

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

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

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

Mr. McCuaig: Alex McCuaig, Office of the Speaker.

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

Ms Babcock: Erin Babcock, Stony Plain.

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

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

Ms Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, executive director of corporate services and Acting Clerk, administration.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Acting Clerk, procedure, and Law Clerk and executive director of House services.

The Chair: My name is Bob Wanner, the MLA for Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: I understand that we have some members joining us on the phone lines. Ms Drever, are you there?

Drever: Yeah. Hello, everyone. Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

Mrs. Pitt: Good morning. Angela Pitt, MLA, Airdrie.

The Chair: And from Banff?

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. Cameron Westhead, MLA for Banff-Cochrane.

The Chair: Another member has joined us. If you could introduce yourself.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Derek Fildebrandt, Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you forgot me. I'm not in the room. Otherwise, I'm unforgettable.

The Chair: Yeah, that's right. Mr. Nixon, would you formally introduce yourself. My apologies.

Mr. Nixon: No problem. Jason Nixon, MLA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: Just to clarify for the record, Mr. Fildebrandt and Mr. Clark are attending the meeting today but are not members of the committee.

There are no substitutions today? No.

The agenda and briefing notes were posted to the committee's internal website. If anyone requires copies of those documents, please let the committee clerk know. I'd just point out for the members of the committee – and I want to thank the staff – that we committed to posting material about one week prior to the meeting day for members to have time, and we, in fact, did that this time again.

A few operational issues. The consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff. We would ask that we keep mobile devices on silent for the duration of our meeting. Audio and video of the committee proceedings are streamed live on the Internet, broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV, and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio and video access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

Hon. members, are there any additions or changes to the agenda?

If not, would one of the members move adoption of our meeting agenda. Member Cortes-Vargas. All in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Approval of the meeting minutes from June 21, 2018. You should have a copy of those meeting minutes. Are there any errors or omissions to the minutes?

If not, would a member move adoption of the minutes? Mr. Dang. All in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, say no. The motion is carried.

Let me just briefly speak to the parameters of the Legislative Assembly Office budget estimates. I had discussions with one or two members in the past about this process. In fact, it goes back, I think, to about 2012, where at least there was reference to that. Actually, there was discussion about that at our September 14, 2017, meeting. Does everyone have a copy of the parameters document, all of the committee members?

Before I turn the matter over to Ms Scarlett and the other staff, just let me make a few comments. Yet again the LAO will not be seeking any increase above that proposed and approved by the Assembly for the '18-19 fiscal year. Based on approval of the parameters and any other direction provided by the committee today, the LAO will bring forward a draft 2019-20 – it's difficult to say that; time moves fast – budget for the committee's consideration at our next meeting. If there are any specific additional pieces of information the committee would like, we would make best efforts to provide that to you at today's meeting.

I think Ms Scarlett will be proceeding with the broad overview. Please proceed.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you very much, Chair and committee members. As the chair outlined, it is our intent here today to provide a brief overview and supplement to the document that you have in front of you. With the permission of the chair and committee, I'd like to provide the overview, and we can come back to any questions. As well, we have the majority of the LAO management committee here today, so if there's any further clarification required, we can also call upon them. I realize that this process is not a new one. It is one that we have followed for a few years here now, and it works well for us. So thank you very much.

As was stated already, overall we are not proposing any increase in the budget from last year. We are as an LAO committed to continuing to provide a level of service that meets and, hopefully, exceeds the needs of members and staff, and as always we'll try to find savings whenever possible without compromising the service level.

As we go through the document, in terms of the components of it, I'd like to speak to a few. With respect to the LAO branch budgets we parallel the public service as it relates to compensation, and we are not aware at this time that there is any proposal for any

adjustments. Therefore, we are not projecting any increases for our opted out, excluded, management, nonmanagement groups, and our benefit costs will continue to be budgeted and presented based on actuals and projected increases or decreases, as was the case last year.

With respect to the branch budgets in adhering to the authority of the Assembly, it's proposed that our branch budgets again be prepared on the assumption that there will be 75 sessional days based on the sessional calendar, with an average of 30 hours per week and 82 committee meetings. This average takes into account an allotment for some evening sittings if required.

9:10

For your information, then, for next year, based on the sessional calendar as it exists right now, we are projecting 69 sessional days, assuming that the fall or the spring session is not extended. Of course, we're unable to predict the number of committee meetings, so again we are using the formula to try to use it as an average and a base, as we've done in the past. However, I can confirm for this year, based on the sessional calendar and assuming that the fall session is not extended, that we are projecting 70 sessional days and 95 committee meetings to the end of March 2019. Therefore, I feel comfortable recommending that we continue to budget based on the model that has been approved in previous years.

With respect to MLA contingency funding, as referenced in last year's budget, you will see some projected costs related to the 2019 provincial election. As everyone knows, the provincial election must be held between March 1 and May 31 of 2019. Many initiatives are already in place. We've spent a lot of time within the LAO starting to plan for and prepare materials to assist members and staff in and around the time of the election. But it is a very, very busy time, with additional support over and above our core supports in terms of making sure that we are taking care of outgoing and incoming returning and new members and staff, getting members up and running in their constituency offices, getting them settled here, and helping them with any training required both for the members and for the staff to continue forward. So there is a small amount that we will be representing again for those purposes.

With respect to the MLA administration budget it's proposed that the budgeted amounts for members' allowances, reimbursable expenses, and costs of services provided directly to members ensure that there are adequate resources to meet the requirements of the orders. [An electronic device sounded] What that means, however, like last year, is that we will be preparing the budget based on the assumption that member remuneration will not increase.

MSC amended the respective orders to not allow for any adjustments for the period of April 1, 2013, until two months after the first day of the 30th Legislature. In addition, that also means that the individual retirement investment option funding will also not increase, and consistent with what has already been stated, the costs for health benefits and other by-law benefits will be budgeted based on actual anticipated changes. This also means that in the constituency office with the constituency budgets there is no projected market or in-range adjustments being proposed in the budget that will come back. [An electronic device sounded]

With respect to the member's services allowances, as you know, there are four components. Again, paralleling last year, there's no proposed increase for those components. A reminder that, as it relates to the communications component, there was a decision made over the last several years that the funding be held at the 2015-16 level. Basically, that's the postage component, where that funding or component of that funding has been held at \$1.30 whereas real postage right now is around \$1.70. Promotional components: status quo. Just a note that as a result of the electoral boundary changes, work is under way right now in terms of reviewing

and updating the numbers associated, the statistics associated with that, but overall we are not anticipating significant changes to the bottom line directly related to the budget with that.

The Chair: I just might mention, particularly to the members on the phone, that there is a little bit of feedback coming, so I caution you about that, please. I'm advised that it's a very complicated process; it's called "press mute."

Keep going, Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. With respect to the caucus budgets, again, we are proposing that there be no changes to the caucus budgets with respect to the general inflation factor or any market or in-range adjustments.

Again, we have outlined for you some additional information related to the planning and development initiatives. Basically, this line item is primarily focused on, if you will, the ongoing care and feeding of our core systems and infrastructure that support the activities of the House and committees.

In summary and in short, the LAO is proposing that we will not be seeking any increase in the amount voted by the Assembly against the 2019-20 fiscal year, and as always we will strive to find efficiencies wherever possible.

I must say that we want to, again, thank all members and your staff for your ongoing assistance and support. It's very much appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you, Cheryl.

Let me just echo that from these last several years of my connection I want to thank all of the staff for their day-to-day work as well as their support for some of the service requirements and expectations that you've been providing to the members. Some of those changes continue as we speak, but I'm really pleased that we've been able to make the kinds of improvements that members have asked for.

Let me open it to the floor. What questions do you have with respect to the parameters document? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the LAO for providing that presentation. I think it's really great that we're seeing an awareness of maintaining our budget and, ongoing, not increasing it. I think it's something that all Albertans expect us to do, and it mirrors what's being done in the public service.

I do have a few questions, particularly about just a small item under the contingency funding. I mean, it's not a huge amount, but I guess one of the questions I had is: could you explain what you anticipate in terms of office modifications in the EFB? I understand, obviously, there is an election coming up, but how large might those changes be and how many of them? I'm not asking you to predict an election here, but I mean what is typical for office changes in terms of, I guess, year to year?

The Chair: I'm not sure that I want her to even answer that because that might be translated in a number of different ways. I think we can speak to historical, but to that extent I think it's speculative at best.

Ms Scarlett: I will try to speak, but more in general terms. After each election, obviously, we are receiving the results. We know what the caucus sizes look like. [An electronic device sounded]

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, are you back to home-schooling again? The best part of the sound that I've heard this morning is your children. Just a reminder on the mute.

Keep going, Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. The question was to speak to some of the anticipated changes that might happen after the election with respect to the EFB. As in past years, dependent upon the sizes of the caucuses, we need to take a look at where we can best accommodate members within our facilities in the Legislature Building, in the Edmonton Federal Building. Right now, you know, the floors and the areas are built with certain hard walls and configurations and facilities within each of the spaces.

9:20

So it will be our challenge to look to see what kind of flexibility might be needed dependent upon the numbers of the caucuses and work very quickly using a lot of common sense and reason to try to on an initial basis take and accommodate members, move members as required to areas that will better fit the numbers that their caucuses represent, and then work towards a plan, if needed, in terms of some long-term kinds of modifications: moving of walls, changing of boardrooms, increase/decrease of number of offices and other support areas.

This is an activity that happens after every election, and we try to be as fluid as we can in terms of accommodating. Quite frankly, sometimes there are some temporary spaces just in terms of, if you will, the flip process, in terms of helping departing members, retiring members, and caucuses clean up and get ready for wherever they're moving to and vice versa.

The Chair: Well, let me just say that the shorter answer to this is that I think that the LAO will be managing – if the speculation, the estimation in the budget is too low, we're still going to provide the service within the budgets approved by the committee. I must say that some of the other more experienced around the table – if we want to stay on budget, we've really got to anticipate all of those shifts that have happened in the last two or three years. That was a bit of humour.

Go ahead, Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that sort of answers a little bit of my next follow-up here, which was: so we're able to consider that even with changes coming up in an election, whether that's changes to the EFB or things like changes because of the boundary changes, we're still anticipating that we can stay within a budget with a zero increase? Is that correct?

Ms Scarlett: Correct. That is what we are proposing.

Mr. Dang: Yeah. I guess, sort of just one more follow-up. Are we basing this prediction on, like, historical prices or costs of making these changes and sort of just anticipating that – I mean, 2015, obviously, was probably the largest change in a lifetime – it would have exceeded or would be similar to those types of costs?

Ms Scarlett: Again, when we bring the budget back to the table, I think you'll find and compare that looking at last year's line item for that, it was not a big line item. We are not anticipating that it will be a big line item this year either, this upcoming year. We will be looking for ways to take and do what we need to do with what we have.

I also need to acknowledge that we work in partnership, particularly as it relates to moves and building walls, changing walls, reconfiguration, with the co-operation of Alberta Infrastructure, and we greatly appreciate that as well.

Mr. Dang: Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: I just wanted to say thank you. This is, I think, almost the fourth budget where you're going in zeros, and you've done that year over year. If not the third?

Ms Scarlett: It would be the fourth.

Cortes-Vargas: That would be the fourth. Yeah. So I just wanted to thank you all for that work.

I also acknowledge that the previous situation in 2015 you did while you were also moving from the Annex to the Federal Building. So, hopefully, that will have a positive impact on the staff as well, that it's not as hectic trying to deal with MLAs transitioning and having all of their things in their boxes. I want to really just take a moment to thank you for the difficulty that that is as well. That's it.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Just, first of all, again, like some of my colleagues, I'm here to say thank you to the LAO for making what I'm sure wasn't an easy effort to come to this point. To hold the line on expenditures is something that I think is responsible.

Since we're between Clerks right now, is the Clerk's salary in the budget, or is it out of the budget? I'm assuming it's in the budget, but it won't be spent until we appoint a new Clerk. Am I right in so thinking? I'm happy to be corrected on that.

The Chair: Well, the expenditures for the transition and selection, et cetera, will be in this budget, keeping in mind that we have some Acting Clerks here who might need a little bit of backfill in their area. So any costs related to the transition and the selection of a new Clerk will be within the confines of this budget that you approve.

Mr. McIver: Please don't take that as a criticism, Chair. It was more of a clarification that we don't have to look forward to supplementary estimates after we hire a permanent Clerk. What I think I just heard from you is "no" because representation of a potential salary is already in the budget. That was the question that I was getting around to, that we don't have to look forward to any supplementary budgets for that reason probably.

The Chair: Thank you. None taken. I've learnt in this job that the thing you avoid at all costs is to go back for a supplemental budget. We ain't going back for it.

Mr. McIver: Well, not everybody feels the same way as you, sir, but I appreciate your sentiment. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering, I guess, you know, that last bold statement that you've made, I mean, one of the components that I know I wouldn't mind seeing sooner rather than later is the recalculation of the MSA based on the matrix – I know it says that the budget based on existing major components may be revised – like, not for this session but for the next one, so we can kind of see where we'd be with the new boundaries. Now, is that something that we could request for the committee? Could we get that just to see how suitable it's going to be, basically?

Ms Scarlett: There are folks presently working on those calculations, and we expect to come to the next meeting with that information. That is our hope.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments with respect to the submission made about the parameters document? Ms Babcock. Welcome.

Ms Babcock: Thank you. I was looking at the planning and development initiatives, and I'm wondering if you can provide us with some information about the online catalogue. What does that look like? What's the anticipated cost of that? Does it allow for online ordering? And, you know, do you think it's going to help increase revenues for Alberta Branded?

I'm actually very curious about the self-serve onboarding processes that were mentioned in the planning and development initiatives. What does that mean for the LAO staffing levels, and what does that look like for members and for staff as we go forward?

Ms Scarlett: Again, I can talk to the general, and it would be our intent when we bring the budget back that we can have the individual managers talk to specific initiatives to provide more information on that. With respect to some of the self-serve in this year's budget we had identified that we have a project presently under way in terms of a redesign of our internal and external website, and part and parcel of that are components of that set up so that we are trying to figure out how we can better get information more accessible to our members and the staff and more interactive, to make it easy so that when they do onboard, it's not so paper intensive, it's there at a touch of a hat, it's very searchable, and it's on members' time frames, staff time frames instead of waiting for that phone call back.

Now, of course, we're here at any time to help, but we want better tools, and folks are more used to just "How do I," type it in, and there's your answer. Some of our initiatives tied to both the external website and the internal website are to develop some tools to make that easier. As well, we are gearing that same concept in terms of the election, so when we are bringing in new members and new staff, looking for ways, in addition to the one-on-one and the personal, of how we can supplement.

Those are some of those initiatives or the thought process behind those. Work is well under way on that initiative to be ready in that phase for the election.

9:30

Ms Babcock: I was just going to say that it should actually cut the administrative costs and administrative burden to the LAO at the point, when that comes into effect.

Ms Scarlett: That will be something we need to evaluate as we go along. Some of our pain points are looking for easier ways to get the information from you. What we still have to do with the information when we get it may not change much; however, in phase 2 or 3 we're looking at taking that information and ways through databases that can get it right into our financial systems. Part of that initiative is that we have this OnTap 2 pilot project right now, that some of you are helping us test in terms of online submissions of expense claims, and the hope with that is that we can take that through additional phases where it then can go right into the system. Yes, we would see efficiencies and streamlining, absolutely.

Ms Babcock: Awesome. Thank you.

The Chair: Just to your question about the online catalogue. Since we are here, I'll just use this as an information sales pitch, if you would, to the public. There are some great products that have been created by Albertans that are in that store, and this is just another opportunity to try and let people know what's there. It really is quite

exceptional, and we should all be proud of what we're able to demonstrate. This is one of those little gems that can be found in the Federal Building on the Legislature Grounds.

Are there any other questions or comments with respect to the parameter document? Seeing and hearing none, is someone prepared to move a motion for approval of the parameters? Mr. Dang. Are there any other questions? It's simply approval to direct the LA Office to prepare 2019-20 budget estimates according to the parameters approved on October 25, 2018. Agreed? On the phones is there anyone opposed to the motion made by Mr. Dang? Hearing none, I would indicate that the motion is carried.

Now I think we move along to Mr. Fildebrandt. Welcome.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: You should have copies of correspondence from Mr. Fildebrandt that was sent to my office earlier in the year. Let's deal with the mileage case first. I'll ask Mr. Fildebrandt to outline his request.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members, for having me at the Members' Services Committee today. There are two items that I've requested be put before the committee today. In the first, dealing with MLA mileage expense claims, I'm going to ask this committee to consider two motions. I'm not a voting member of this committee, so I would ask for the co-operation of a member to put this forward. Our FMAS, LAO, do an excellent job in processing the rather complicated system of expenses and mileage and all of the various financial transactions that take place here. It's never a perfect system. It's always improving, and there is still room for improvement.

In the vast majority of the private sector when employees of a company have business travel claims to make, they're required to provide some kind of logbook indicating where they have travelled before they can submit mileage claims. We are not currently as MLAs required to do so. In the 21st century it is rather easy. I know that many of my colleagues around this table have apps on their phone to track where they travel. I opt just to have a member of my staff use Google Maps to find the shortest route for travel. I just trust that she's right when I sign off on it, and I believe that the honour system does work.

We don't need to have government-installed GPS trackers on every MLA's vehicle, but I think it's appropriate that we have some kind of verification process if it's required. I don't think any kind of process should be intrusive into privacy. People don't need to know the routes we are taking or even specifically where. But at the very least the Legislative Assembly Office would be able to have this kind of information if we keep some form of logbook. I don't think that that should be an overly prescriptive process.

So I would ask my colleagues of the Members' Services Committee to consider putting forward the following motion: that the Clerk of the Members' Services Committee provide direction on the feasibility of requiring MLAs and ministers to provide evidence supporting mileage claims.

The Chair: Did you get that, Karen?
Could you try it again slower?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm told I speak fast.

That the Clerk of the Members' Services Committee provide direction on the feasibility of requiring MLAs and ministers to provide evidence supporting mileage claims.

The Chair: Thank you. I think you've got that now, Karen.

Mrs. Sawchuk: I'm getting there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If need be, we'll go back to get it repeated.

Before we go to the discussion on that, I'm wondering if we can get an explanation of what the current practice is if that's agreeable. Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. Very briefly, pursuant to the transportation order, members are aware that there is a provision for reimbursement of fuel and related charges. In addition, there is a kilometre allowance set out, that is 7 cents less than that outlined for the public service of Alberta. I do know that in our orientation with new members, when they come in and at any time when asked, we strongly encourage all members to keep logs of their activity for future reference.

Cortes-Vargas: Just given that the member is not part of the committee and he can't move a motion, I would actually prefer to hear both the motions that he has suggested instead of having a discussion on a motion that is not moved in front of the committee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm happy to read it, yeah. The second motion I'm hoping that the . . .

The Chair: Hold on just a minute.

So your request is to move to deal with both matters at the same time?

Cortes-Vargas: Just given that he can't move a motion, the issue before the committee is actually his request and his letter. So I'd just like to hear the rest of what he has to say before we keep the discussion going.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I think what the member is saying is that she doesn't want to deal with both items 5(a) and (b). It's just that under item (a) there are two separate motions I have, and it's reasonable that she wants to hear the second one.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I misunderstood. I thought you were going to the (b) item. Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. The second one deals with appropriate levels of compensation for mileage. Members know that we receive a generous per-kilometre reimbursement in addition to all fuel costs, in addition to oil changes and some other maintenance issues and cleaning issues. It is a generous regime of reimbursement. There are legitimate questions about if we are at appropriate levels compared to the private sector. The per-kilometre rate is lower than it is for the rest of the public sector, but we also receive all of our fuel and several other costs reimbursed. I am not qualified at this moment to say specifically what the exact amount should be per kilometre if we are receiving full fuel reimbursement, but I think that that is an appropriate question to be answered for Albertans, if it is appropriate for us to adjust this to be in line with norms in the private sector.

9:40

The second motion that I would ask a member to consider moving and members to consider adopting is that the Members' Services Committee will review if current reimbursement amounts for fuel and mileage are appropriate for MLAs and ministers and provide recommendations if changes are appropriate.

I'm not recommending any specific amount that it be changed to. We need the facts in front of us. I know that the staff and Clerk of this committee do some excellent work, as we just heard from Ms Scarlett, on the parameters for the budget in the coming year. So I

would ask for both a recommendation on how we can ensure that we are logging appropriate mileage and, for the second issue of if the reimbursement amounts are appropriate, that they would come back to us with recommendations and facts for further consideration of the committee.

The Chair: Having heard the discussion thus far and the two requested motions, what's the wish? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that there's something certainly worth while for us to look at and consider here. I think, to Mr. Fildebrandt's point, we've certainly had issues with other aspects of public spending with a number of things – temporary residences, for example – but I think fiscal responsibility and prudent use of taxpayer money is something that we all strive for every day.

I think we also want a system that our LAO friends can use that's easy for them to administer and perhaps isn't burdensome on our public service. So I think it's something that we need, that common sense, but there are a lot of parts to this question. I understand there are multiple pieces to even the kilometre reimbursement. Some require receipts; some don't. And those numbers change depending on whether you're urban or rural. I see Ms Scarlett nodding there. I mean, there are a lot of pieces, and it can be confusing for members at times.

I would like to suggest – and maybe I won't put a motion out yet. I've been chairing the Members' Services subcommittee on the Members' Services orders, and that's a group that has members of the Official Opposition and the government on it. We've been able to do some very productive, consensus-based work, which you'll hear more about later. So I'd like to suggest for discussion that perhaps this is an issue that that subcommittee could continue to look at in an ongoing manner and report back on later. When we saw other issues of a similar nature in terms of the temporary accommodation allowance, the subcommittee was able to do good work on it. Yeah. I'll leave that out for the floor.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of clarification.

The Chair: Yes, Derek.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Dang, I just want to clarify what it is that you're recommending. Is it that instead of directing the Clerk to come with recommendations, the committee would direct the subcommittee to come forward with recommendations?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. Just because it's something that we've done in the past for similar types of issues, and that subcommittee has worked in a bipartisan manner to come back with consensus recommendations on similar expense-type issues.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I just have a question for the Clerk. As is the case with the Members' Services Committee here, nonmembers of the committee are able to attend but not vote. Are nonmembers of the committee able to attend a subcommittee meeting to participate as nonvoting members?

Ms Dean: With the consent of the subcommittee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: All right.

So my question to members of this committee – well, both a statement and a question. I am not able to move the motion myself, but I would be willing to amend the proposed motion such that instead of asking the Clerk to come forward with recommendations both for logbooks and for appropriate levels of mileage reimbursement, we would ask the subcommittee to come forward

with those recommendations, and also attach to that that I would be permitted to participate in the subcommittee's proceedings as a nonvoting member.

The Chair: Good question. I think that your question should probably be to the subcommittee that decides. I'm not exactly certain – are all of the members on that subcommittee with us today or on the phone? They are. Okay.

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I can't speak for the other members on the subcommittee, but I'd be happy to reach out and definitely do some consultation as we move through that process. I mean, we've done that in other cases in the past as well for other issues that have come forward.

I do have a motion here that I'd like to put down. Maybe I could test the room and see if people might be amenable to this motion. I'd move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services refer the matter of the current rate for reimbursement of mileage for members and the manner in which mileage is recorded and claimed by members to the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders.

The Chair: Having heard the motion . . .

Mr. McIver: Could you say it out loud again? I apologize. I was listening; I promise.

Mr. Dang: I'll say it again slower.

Mr. McIver: No. I just want to make sure I didn't miss something. I want to speak to it, but I want to make sure I didn't miss something.

Mr. Dang: Okay. I'll read it out again. I would move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services refer the matter of the current rate for reimbursement of mileage for members and the manner in which mileage is recorded and claimed by members to the subcommittee to review the MSC orders.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the questions being asked here are legitimate questions. I think the public will be interested in hearing your response to them. This isn't the first time these issues have been discussed, but I think they've been discussed before because they're worthy of discussion. So discussing them again sounds like a good idea to me. It's something that I think from time to time we need to check on with ourselves and, more importantly, check with the public to see that we're on the right track. If we can do things better and if there's a more transparent way to do them or perhaps a different and better way to recover expenses required to do the job, then I think the public will be interested. I'm in favour of having that discussion.

The Chair: Derek, you had another point?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes. I just want to thank Mr. McIver for his comments, and while I don't have a vote to cast for or against, I'm supportive of the reworded motion put forward by Mr. Dang.

I just do want to clarify with Ms Dean in advance, though, that the FCP caucus and other caucuses that would be interested would be able to be present at this subcommittee. My question is: would it be the Members' Services Committee that would decide the participation on a nonvoting basis of other caucuses, or is it the subcommittee itself that would make that decision?

Ms Dean: It would be up to the subcommittee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: If I may ask: which members of this committee are part of that subcommittee right now? So Mr. Dang and . . .

The Chair: Cortes-Vargas.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Cortes-Vargas.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Nixon and Mr. McIver as well.

Cortes-Vargas: And MLA Westhead.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Westhead, yeah.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Again, not as a voting member of this committee, I would be supportive of the reworded motion putting this to the subcommittee on the understanding that the FCP caucus and other caucuses not represented on that subcommittee would be allowed to participate as nonvoting members.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, I'm happy to test the committee with that at the next meeting of the subcommittee, but I'm also happy to say that we'll definitely be consulting with the caucuses as they move forward. What that looks like: I'll have to speak with the subcommittee members, obviously.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Dang, I have been consulted a couple of times on some of the subcommittee work that's happened. I have to say that sometimes it feels a little post hoc, as in: "We've discussed something. What do you think?" It hasn't been where I've been included in the act of discussion. I don't certainly expect to speak for Mr. Fildebrandt, but I suspect that his expectation is that as the committee deliberates on this topic, he would be included. I would expect the same thing. So I would hope that in this case it would be active participation as the committee considers the question and that we go back and forth on some things as opposed to a phone call saying: "Hey, we talked about these things. What do you think?" That feels like the sort of consultation that resulted in a pipeline not going ahead. So I'd appreciate that we're active participants although in a nonvoting way, just in the same way that we are in this committee.

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments from the members on the telephone?

Hearing none, and since I didn't understand your closing comment, Mr. Dang, to make the amendment, the wording is as you originally stated, or did you have a correction to that?

Mr. Dang: No. This is good.

The Chair: Karen, if you could just read that one more time.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion by Mr. Dang is that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services refer the matter of the current rate for reimbursement of mileage for members and the manner in which mileage is recorded and claimed by members to the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, say no. Members on the telephone: all those in favour, say aye.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Now they're all on mute.

The Chair: Houston, do you have any comments for or against with respect to the motion made by Mr. Dang?

I am presuming that they have left the building, so I'm going to move the motion. Just to confirm that we don't have a technical issue here, any advice for me? No. If you are there, can you double-check your mute buttons to make sure they're now off?

Mr. Cooper: Aye.

The Chair: Keep going.

Mr. Nixon: Aye.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, it's Nathan Cooper here.

The Chair: You don't get a – is he on this committee?

Mrs. Sawchuk: Yes.

The Chair: I'm going to declare the motion carried.

Agreed?

So I understand, Derek, that that took care of the two motions you proposed.

Now if we could move to the second item. Go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I want to thank members for their co-operation on the last item of business, to make sure we can improve our system around MLA mileage claims together.

On July 20 this summer I had a rather busy day in Calgary as we founded the Freedom Conservative Party of Alberta. The same day I sent a letter to Speaker Wanner requesting that the FCP be recognized as an official caucus of the Alberta Legislative Assembly and that the FCP caucus be given appropriate levels of funding commensurate with precedent during this Legislature for other caucuses.

Mr. Clark, who is with us today, began this Legislature as a single-member caucus; he's been successful at increasing the size of that. The Liberal caucus began and continues as a single-member caucus. Unless I'm mistaken, outgoing Speaker Zwozdesky recognized both as caucuses and ensured that they had, to my understanding, one-quarter of appropriate caucus funding, including a leader's office. Maybe Mr. Clark can correct me if I'm wrong, but as his caucus has grown towards four, which, I understand, is the level at which one receives a full caucus budget, that budget has increased proportionately as he continues to collect MLAs in the Siberian section of the Legislature.

With the precedent set during this very Legislature, it was my request in my letter to Mr. Speaker on July 20 that the FCP be recognized as a caucus with appropriate levels of funding. I have served as the interim leader of the party since we founded it and am now the official leader of the party, so I believe it is appropriate for us to be treated the same as other caucuses of the same size. I would ask that members honour the precedent set during this very Legislature and treat the FCP caucus the same as the Alberta Party and Liberal caucuses have been.

I'd ask that a member of this committee move that the Members' Services Committee approve retroactive to July 20, 2018, the date of Mr. Fildebrandt's letter to the Speaker requesting that the Freedom Conservative Party caucus receive appropriate levels of

funding, including a leader's office allowance, proportionate to the number of MLAs in the caucus.

The Chair: Is there any additional information as background for staff that you believe would be helpful to this discussion? Any comments from staff? Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that, you know, in the interest of consistency and in the interest of what this Legislature has granted, based on some historical precedent dating all the way back to the 1980s, when the NDs were represented by Grant Notley, I guess I'd just like to offer some comments. While Mr. Fildebrandt and the Freedom Conservatives and I and the Alberta Party have quite vastly different ideological views and views of the world, I think that in the interests of serving democracy, I would speak in favour of Mr. Fildebrandt's request.

Just to provide some context as to how it is that the Alberta Party caucus and the Liberal caucus under Dr. Swann received a quarter share of the leader's allowance, the caucus leader was in the House, and it was a party recognized by Elections Alberta. I think that while Dr. Starke would try to argue that he should also attract the leader's allowance, my understanding – and I certainly would stand to be corrected here if this is not accurate – is that he's a single member representing the PC caucus, but there is no equivalent recognized by Elections Alberta in a form that Dr. Starke could run under in the next election. Mr. Fildebrandt will run as the Freedom Conservative. The Liberals will field candidates in the next election. The Alberta Party certainly will and would have even if we had remained with only one MLA. I understand that is part of the rationale as to how it is that the Liberals and the Alberta Party were granted the quarter share of the leader's allowance.

I'll also say – and perhaps there will be some further discussion here when Mr. Dang reports on the subcommittee, and I can maybe expand on this point then – that we live in a time when democracy is pretty fragile. Right now the Alberta Legislature is in a transitional time. We have a number of single-member caucuses. We have an independent. We have a bit of an odd situation at the moment, but I don't think that should disentitle smaller parties from receiving the support they need. There's a fixed amount of work that needs to be done to prepare for committees, to prepare for bill debates, to adequately represent a view of Albertans, and that transcends the absolute number of members that you have. As you grow your caucus, you certainly attract more research dollars and more caucus support, but I think that it is important that we recognize there is a fixed amount of work to simply do the job irrespective of how large or small your caucus may be.

I would speak in favour of Mr. Fildebrandt's request.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I think what Mr. Clark is saying is that it's not the size of the caucus; it's what you do with it.

The Chair: Yeah. I'm searching for a better analogy.

Mr. McIver, do you have a question or comment?

Mr. McIver: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? I agree with much of what the last two speakers said. It occurs to me that the precedent started at a time when there were very few people that worked in government in the Legislature. Having said that, what I do believe is that we've got to treat everybody the same. I think that at some point, obviously not today but at some point, we probably need to decide how many members constitute a party and how many don't, but that's not what's before us today. Actually, nothing is before us today because nothing has been moved. There's just discussion before us today.

10:00

But in terms of discussion, I think that, as they say, what's good for the goose is good for the gander, and if one one-member party gets a level of funding, I don't know how we can refuse another one-member party. In the spirit of treating people equally that are in equal circumstances, which I think is one of the things that we try to do in the Legislature, I don't have a particular problem based on that. Even though I don't necessarily agree with the precedent, what I do agree with is treating people that are in equal circumstances in an equal way.

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

The Chair: You're there, Mr. Cooper. Go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the other members of the committee, including the independent Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I think that I would like to firmly say that I disagree with the precedent, and at the time that we had this last discussion, I provided comments on the record. I think Mr. Clark will recall what joy and pleasure it brought me to refer to him as the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow and to the independent Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the former leader of the Liberal Party, and I look forward to speaking about the independent Member for Strathmore-Brooks, because that is, in fact, what those individuals are, though not Mr. Clark any longer.

I think that I would support the ongoing poor decision that has been made in the past because I agree with Mr. McIver's assessment that individual members of the Assembly should be treated equally. But as I stated at that time, it is very important – you know, I'm happy to check *Hansard*, but I believe I said that this is a decision that needs to be made by this Assembly prior to the next election so that we are not in this position on a go-forward basis, where single members are taking over other political parties or trading new political parties for a net financial gain for those caucuses.

You know, at the time that Mr. Notley was granted a leader's allowance, there was virtually zero opposition, and at the time that the NDP caucus was led by Mr. Mason, there was virtually no opposition. That is not the case presently. That may not be the case after the next election. But no matter what the results of the next election are, it's incumbent upon us to ensure that we're not in this sort of unclear quagmire, where the Members' Services orders or the standing orders present such a grey area that it creates uncertainty for the next Speaker, whoever that may be, be it Speaker Wanner or otherwise.

I would just like to, again, place before the committee a very important issue. In fact, I would like to move a motion that the subcommittee make a recommendation prior to the end of the calendar year to the Members' Services Committee on what party status will be following the 2019 election.

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Sorry. Are we talking to the motion on the floor now?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. We're speaking to the motion that I just put on the floor. That is what I would recommend.

Cortes-Vargas: I'm just looking to the chair for clarification.

The Chair: He's proposed a motion. He's a member of the committee. I would have preferred that maybe we have a little more dialogue.

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, my report is coming up very shortly here after this item. I'd perhaps suggest, Mr. Cooper, that you'd like to maybe table this until after that report or such, because there might be information that's forthcoming that would assist in this.

Mr. Cooper: Agreed. I'm fine with that.

The Chair: All right. I'm noting that you've withdrawn the motion or at least tabled it. There's a need for other discussion on the matter. Is that correct, committee?

Member Cortes-Vargas.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, can I be on the speakers list?

The Chair: Yes, please. Go ahead.

Oh. You had the floor?

Cortes-Vargas: Yes.

The Chair: Sorry. She was just waiting for her mic to come on. Go ahead.

Cortes-Vargas: Just a few comments before you go on, Mr. Nixon. I think that there's actually some level of agreement here that there is a bit of a quagmire as to how this funding is being set out. There is precedent that makes a very good case for why you should get this based on what has been done during this Legislature. It makes sense.

That being said, when we look at the numbers, the proportionality of member to funding, based on caucuses as well, is starting to become such a gap, and it's starting to look quite disproportionate, and I think that that's one of the reasons that it was first referred to the subcommittee to look at. I think it's never an easy question to ask oneself or anybody how to resolve how caucus funding is delegated in a fair and equitable manner, to make sure that we address the fact that, you know, in a smaller caucus scalability isn't there, that you're still expected to be on committees.

I think that there is general agreement that that support should be there, but there is also the ongoing question of how we're going to solve the caucus funding issue altogether. I think that it has previously been mentioned that any changes we make should be made as of the 30th Legislature, not the 29th, to make sure that any changes that happen don't unfairly impact the caucuses, independent or otherwise, that have received funding. I think that that is something that I absolutely can get onboard with, because there is an ultimate belief that equity is important and that fairness in how we treat each other is also important.

I do have a question for the LAO just given one comment that was made about retroactivity. Given that we're supporting this based on precedent, I think that when you receive this funding, it should also be based on precedent. With Member Clark, based on how it was proceeded on when he got his funding, if his was retroactive, then sure. If it wasn't – I think that basically we've been doing this all to ensure fairness, that it should be congruent with what has been done in the past. I don't have information in front of me to answer that, and I would frankly trust the LAO to be able to make that decision in accordance with how the other decisions were carried out.

I would be prepared to move a motion regarding the FCP caucus funding that the caucus receive a leader allowance comparable to what is currently in place for a single-member Liberal caucus. I'm open to wording this in the best way to move a motion to make sure that the member gets his leadership allowance.

The Chair: We now have a motion on the floor.

Mr. Nixon, you had wished to speak before the motion. Are you prepared to speak your comments to the motion that's before us now?

Mr. Nixon: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be real brief. I think Mr. Cooper hit the nail right on the head with his comments on the history of this situation. As a member of the subcommittee led by MLA Dang, my understanding – maybe MLA Dang will talk about this when he reports shortly to the committee – is that at your request, Mr. Speaker, the subcommittee has already looked at this issue and will put recommendations in place for the 30th Legislature. Hopefully, that will put this to bed.

10:10

The motion that I just heard I think I can support. I just want to see it one more time before we go through. The reason, though, that I want to be clear on the record why I could support that is because of the issue of fairness. I think it's important for the independent Member for Strathmore-Brooks to be treated the same as the other independent Members of the Legislative Assembly in similar situations.

But I do want to be clear on the record that I am against what I see, quite frankly, as an abuse of taxpayer dollars that has taken place on this issue over the length of the 29th Legislature. To be honest, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's your fault or most people on this committee's fault. It was a situation that we inherited, and I think it's clear – and I hope that we come out of this meeting with it clear – that this needs to be fixed by us. It's our responsibility to make sure that this does not happen in the future.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Just ever so briefly, Mr. Speaker. We held off the last motion, which I thought was a good idea, because Mr. Dang has suggested that he had something to say that would be relative and important to what we're saying here now. But now we've gone ahead with another motion before we hear from Mr. Dang. I don't have a particular problem with the motion, but if there's information that Mr. Dang has made clear that we should have, I'm just curious whether the committee actually wants to hear that information before we go further. I think his suggestion to share that information was a good one, but we never quite got around to letting him share it.

The Chair: I'd just suggest that if there's additional information that you could share now, then he can still reintroduce his second motion after this. If you're agreeable, Mr. Dang?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that in particular cases with Mr. Cooper's original motion there, referring to things being changed this year on funding models prior to the next election or all those types of things, I think the recommendations that the subcommittee will be bringing forward won't affect Mr. Fildebrandt's situation right now, and that's, I think, pretty fair to say. I'd like to suggest that if we're able to move forward with granting Mr. Fildebrandt some stability here, we might want to do that. Is that fair?

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt, you had additional comments. We're on the motion by Member Cortes-Vargas.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes. I would just say, with reference to one of the previous comments, that I think it is shameful that any member of this Legislature would question the motives of someone in founding a caucus and seeking equal resources as all other caucuses and parties here simply because they feel that they are entitled to the word, what it means to be a conservative. People have the right to express themselves in this province and to sit as they wish in this Legislature. I would like to say for the record that I think that's shameful.

The Chair: We're doing well at this meeting. Let's keep moving.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Clark can correct me if I'm wrong, but he and the Liberal caucus received funding retroactive to the date that they were recognized as a caucus or, I should say, that they requested recognition as a caucus. I requested that the FCP caucus be recognized and then treated equally in terms of resources in my letter to you on July 20. When the Alberta Party caucus and the Liberal caucus were recognized and given appropriate resources, that was done to the date that they had requested that that be done, so retroactive, essentially, to the election. There have been over three months that have passed between my letter to yourself and today, because the Members' Services Committee has not met, but in the meantime there has been a functional FCP caucus engaged in doing the work of an opposition party. In keeping with the precedents of how we have done things this Legislature, these resources should be provided retroactive to the date that they were requested, both as recognition as a caucus and with appropriate resources to follow.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Ms Scarlett. If you might have any additional comments that might be helpful for the committee?

Ms Scarlett: By way of clarification to the question on the table right now, I believe it is up to the committee to decide the effective date. In most cases decisions are made, not related to this but general decisions, effective the date of the committee meeting.

However, there have been other situations where the date was set based upon the date of the request or, in this particular case for consideration, would be the date that the party was formed. Any decision that is made or if a decision is made in favour, then, again, the specific funding, of course, for this year would be pro-rated based upon that portion of the year that elapsed, which is the normal process for calculating the funding.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Then could you just clarify in the case of the Alberta Party and the Liberals? Am I correct in saying that they were given leader's office allowances to the date that they requested it and were recognized as caucuses, not to the date of a meeting of the Members' Services Committee?

Ms Scarlett: It is my recollection, Mr. Chair, that that funding was made effective as of the polling date.

The Chair: Well, allow me a minute here to just share. I don't have the information specifically nor do staff today as to what that effective date was. There's been one issue that all of you in this room have heard. I guess the phrase "quagmire" is the one that's there. I have raised it several times that this issue needs to be more clear, and I hope that the committee would consider that in their deliberations.

The other issue that comes to bear – I've reviewed this a couple of times now, several times. There's the additional complexity to it as to if and when you're an interim leader or only a representative

of, et cetera, so I'm hoping that the subcommittee in their deliberations could give greater clarity for the future.

Are there other questions or comments with respect to the motion? Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I just wanted to be clear. I didn't hear anybody question anybody's motives here today. It is unfortunate that people were accused of that because if anybody checks the *Hansard*, they won't find any reference or subtext about anybody questioning anybody's motives. Now, we haven't voted on it yet, but from all the comments that I've heard, we heard everybody on the committee actually supporting what's being asked for, so I would respectfully request that the member that made those accusations take yes for an answer.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I think we're all generally more or less in consensus here, then. I would suggest, perhaps, to further clarify Member Cortes-Vargas's motion here, that we should set the date to be the day, if in previous cases it was as of the polling date, that the Freedom Conservative Party was recognized as a party, and then we can move on.

Cortes-Vargas: Can I just ask, Ms Scarlett, just one more time, just clarifying: is that what was done in the last leadership request? Was that the date that was used?

The Chair: I'm not sure. At least, I certainly can't recall the exact date. I'm not sure if Ms Scarlett or staff can or not. I can tell you that it's just another dimension to this issue. Some precedent has many lives here. I don't remember if it was to the effect of the election date or of the date – I can't remember, and I don't think you have that detailed information available. Is that right?

Ms Scarlett: It is our understating that it was effective as of the polling date. This is a different situation. This question that we're talking about now was not the scenario with the others in terms of a formation of a new caucus or a new party effective as of a date somewhere within the fiscal calendar.

10:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: I think, really, the only discussion now is: should the funding be effective the date of July 20, my letter to the Speaker, or the date just a few days afterwards, when the Speaker responded in a letter to myself recognizing the FCP caucus? If I'm not mistaken, we are debating a matter of two to five days at most, be it July 20, when I requested recognition, or just a few days later, when we were granted recognition.

The Chair: I was just provided, Derek, that on this issue, just to clarify, it wasn't July. It was August 10 that I submitted – the one that came from you was August 10, not July. This is addressed to me on August 10. "I'm writing to you" – well, members have this in their packet. The letter to me is August 10.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I'll have to take responsibility for what happened with staff correspondence. So, then, I would revise my request to be retroactive to the date on which I submitted the letter requesting recognition to yourself.

Cortes-Vargas: I'm just curious, MLA Fildebrandt, when were you acclaimed as leader, and when did you become the leader?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I became the interim leader of the FCP and its House leader on July 20, when the party was founded. It was

recognized already by Elections Alberta on July 20 as the Freedom Conservative Party and me as its interim leader. The party recognized me as its legislative House leader at the same time, and I became its official leader on October 20. For the purposes of this, as with all parties that have changed leadership during our time here, Elections Alberta designations should be separate from the Legislature's designations. I've been the recognized legislative House leader of the party and the interim leader of the party since July 20.

The Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak to the matter?

Mr. Clark: I think Mr. Fildebrandt covered it. There's a distinction between caucus and Elections Alberta. There are some nuances to what you said that I would quibble with, but that's not relevant for this. I think that in the case of Dr. Starke, he is the PC caucus leader, but again that may not be relevant either. The point being that there is a distinction between what happens in terms of Elections Alberta and political parties and what happens in the Legislative Assembly in terms of caucuses.

The Chair: Could we hear the motion once again?

Mr. Clark: Just in the interest of historical accuracy for *Hansard*, I said Dr. Starke; I meant Dr. Swann. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Karen, if we can share the motion.

Mrs. Sawchuk: The motion by Member Cortes-Vargas is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the payment of a leader's office allowance to the Freedom Conservative Party caucus in an amount equal to the leader's office allowance allocated to the Alberta Liberal caucus.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I don't want to drag this out, but if I could just inquire: is the Liberal caucus receiving a leader's office allowance presently?

Ms Scarlett: Yes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. I don't want to be overly ambitious, but if the member would just consider amending it, that it be proportionate to the number of caucus members that the FCP caucus has. These single-member caucuses around here have a tendency to grow over time.

Cortes-Vargas: I mean, I think you just nailed something on the head as to why this is so complicated. There's precedent, but there are no main guidelines as to what happens when someone increases – like, I'm not sure where you're planning on getting this growth. I think that part of it is that right now we're granting a leadership allowance based on precedent that other people have received it. I would almost suggest that you take that "yes," right? If and when another situation arises, then this Members' Services Committee will meet. This is the first time that this issue has been brought in front of the Members' Services Committee, right? Previously, until the last request, it was done through the Speaker's office. So I think that it is important that we, one, are having this discussion on the record. But, two, if something else arises, we'll meet again and discuss it. I think that given the fact that there are precedents right now and that's how we're handling the issue, then we're going to have to discuss it based on that.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, before I go to you, I wonder if I could just check with Mr. Cooper and Mr. Nixon.

Did you have any comments or questions that you wanted to raise?

Mr. Nixon: No. Other than, again, just to reiterate that I think all voting members on the committee seem to be in agreement that, one, going forward we have to treat everybody in the 29th Legislature the same, all members, which is what I think the committee is trying to do, and then, second, hopefully, get this fixed for the 30th Legislature. As such, Mr. Speaker, you should call the question, and let's vote on it. I hear lots of agreement.

The Chair: Before I do that, Mr. Westhead, Ms Drever, do you have any questions, comments? Mrs. Pitt? Okay.

Having heard the motion, all those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried.

First of all, on behalf of the committee, thank you to all of the members over these last three years for the amount of time invested in subcommittee work. I think it's appreciated by everyone.

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to start off by saying that I'd like to thank the members of the subcommittee for some of the great work we've been able to do. We've largely been able to move forward with consensus-based decision-making, and I think that's really reflective of how well the subcommittee works together.

The subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders met yesterday afternoon, and the subcommittee has reached an agreement on a proposed caucus funding model, and we've directed the LAO to prepare a draft report detailing this proposal. Once we have the agreement of all subcommittee members on the draft, we anticipate submitting a second interim report to the committee in the coming weeks, and we're going to continue our work in reviewing the regulations exemption and variance order as well as the letter that was referred to today in this committee by Mr. Fildebrandt.

If there are any questions, I'm happy to take those at this time.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Dang, the chair of the subcommittee – I guess that's where I come from – speaking through the chair here, just to give those watching that are interested in the work that's already been done by the subcommittee some comfort, would it be fair to say that we will do the report on the work that we've pretty much done and are almost at agreement on before we make everybody wait for the new work that we've just sent to the subcommittee today?

Mr. Dang: Absolutely, Mr. McIver. I think we'll certainly be submitting the almost agreed upon work once that report is finalized within weeks.

Mr. McIver: I just thought that there would be people that would say, "Oh; now you're delaying it again," so I thought this would be a good platform for you, as you've just done, to assure people that the wait will be probably better described as fairly short rather than fairly long.

Mr. Dang: Yeah. Certainly, we've agreed, and we just need to approve that final report now.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, I'm sorry. I passed over you before.

Mr. Clark: Not at all. Thank you. I'm quite interested in seeing this report.

A couple of points. I would like very much, I think, for – certainly, Mr. Fildebrandt and myself have expressed our interest in participating actively in the process of talking about travel allowance. Certainly, Mr. Dang, you and I had a conversation yesterday on the report. I expressed some of my feelings to you. I don't know if that was shared with the rest of the subcommittee. Again, the process has been quite opaque. I'm not quite sure what happens. I get a phone call occasionally from yourself, and you inform me that we've had some meetings and some stuff is coming. We've heard the same thing here today. I would request just the courtesy, perhaps, of each caucus being given a draft of that report before it's presented to the committee so that we have an opportunity to prepare.

10:30

What I will say, as I said earlier, is that democracy is fragile, and the sort of dismissive tone that has been taken here about past precedent I think does a disservice to the importance of that precedent in making decisions. Just for the record and for everyone in the room to understand, there really are a couple of different pieces that are at play here. There's the Legislative Assembly Act, which outlines only compensation top-ups, I guess, if you will, for leaders, House leaders, whips of recognized parties in the Assembly.

Dating back to 1997, when the two-member ND caucus was granted official third-party status, it was very clear from the precedent at the time that they were granted official third-party status in the House for purposes of Oral Question Period and for purposes of caucus research dollars but not granted any salary top-up. That is the current situation now for the Alberta Party caucus, not having four members or 5 per cent of the vote in the previous election. That's exactly as it should be.

The Chair: I appreciate the points that you've made. I think they've been made many times before.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I guess what I'm really saying, if you'll just indulge me here briefly, is that I just want to be on the record with my expectations, based on precedent, of what I think this report should say, and that, I think, should be to acknowledge and incorporate the current precedent. Now, whether that is what's going to happen, I don't know, but I think it's very important for all of us in this room to recognize that party sizes over time grow and shrink. There have been times when the ND caucus has not been represented in the Legislature. There have been times when it's been represented by two members, multiple times, in fact, in 1982, 1997, 2001, and 2008, which . . .

Mr. Cooper: I'd like to be on the speakers list.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I think the important point, I would argue, is that regardless of any . . .

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this is about to turn into a subcommittee meeting. That is the problem. I know several of them will leave from my side of the aisle shortly.

Mr. Clark, the chair of the subcommittee has said that he would allow you to participate. I know you have submitted stuff already to the subcommittee. I'm just a little confused. I think what you're saying is important, but I'm not really sure if it's relevant for the meeting we're having.

The Chair: I tend to agree, Mr. Clark. I mean, this is an issue that we've had in this committee. Certainly, I've had discussions about

this issue, and I think the matter you're addressing is largely with respect to the other matter. Nonetheless, I think it's noted. Certainly, it's on the record, and I'm hoping that the subcommittee would consider that.

I think I had Mr. Cooper. Nathan, go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: I would just like to say that if we had the party size recognized in the Members' Services orders, none of this would be a problem, which is what we need to continue to do, which is why I hope to hear from Member Dang.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, did you have any additional comments?

Mr. Nixon: No.

The Chair: Where are we at? Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a very odd day. I'm echoing Mr. Clark more than I like to.

Mr. Clark: I don't like it much either.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's not comfortable.

I think he has to speak here because to date the caucuses – every caucus that is not the government caucus or the Official Opposition caucus is not a part of either this committee or the subcommittee. That subcommittee, as I understand, has not included active participation from the smaller caucuses. I think that this discussion wouldn't have to happen here if the other caucuses were able to participate in an active and meaningful way on the subcommittee.

The Chair: Derek, I think you heard Mr. Dang say earlier that he would be communicating with folks. I believe we need to move on.

I don't know if you have additional comments to make, Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: I think I just want to remind the members here that any time the subcommittee makes any decisions, we have to bring in an interim report, where discussion occurs in the Members' Services Committee. I mean, perhaps those comments should wait until the report is on the floor for discussion because then we're not talking about hypotheticals.

I think it's been made before as well, but I would just remind the members that we have to proceed as well by providing an interim report, and that's what we've done in the past.

The Chair: I'd like to move on, Mr. Clark, if we could.

Mr. Clark: Just a brief process question. I promise not to dive into parliamentary precedent, tempting as it is.

The Chair: Treble would be better than splash, okay?

Mr. Clark: May I just . . .

The Chair: Yeah. Very quickly.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. Just briefly, I want to ask Member Cortes-Vargas, then, or Member Dang if the process here next is that we're going to receive an interim report at the next Members' Services Committee. Is the anticipation that that interim report would be accepted and the recommendations therein implemented as changes to Members' Services orders or that it would be a two-step process where we review the report at that meeting, hold a second meeting to actually implement, and make a recommendation for change to Members' Services orders? I'm just curious about the process.

The Chair: Well, the decisions about the detail, I think, largely rest with the committee's wishes. I guess the preliminary report might suggest that.

Mr. Dang, any additional comments?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. I guess I'd just like to be very clear. I'll defer to Ms Dean, but certainly anything the subcommittee brings forward has to be accepted at this committee – right? – so it can be on the record. It's going to be here, and everyone is going to have an opportunity to see that. It would be posted on the committee website as well, right?

The Chair: With the permission of the committee, I'd like to move on to the next brief subcommittee report.

Cortes-Vargas: Just given the context, you know, we've been working together, consensus-based work. Very similar to Mr. Dang's update, the subcommittee on respectful workplace policies – and forgive me if I mistake the titles of which subcommittee I'm discussing. I'm on both, and the names are actually quite long sometimes. We also met yesterday afternoon, and we are in a very similar position to the other subcommittee except that we did not get an item referred to the subcommittee today. I'm, you know, looking forward to this draft policy document being finalized by the members of the subcommittee, and then, hopefully, in a meeting soon both of those will be presented to the Members' Services Committee after the subcommittee members have voted on finalizing this report.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other matters for the committee?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. I just want to comment on that report. Thank you to the chair of the subcommittee for the report. I'm glad we're moving, of course, to the end of the meeting, Mr. Speaker. I would point out, though, that it's a little bit interesting that the guests that we have at Members' Services only seem to want to talk about the subcommittee that involves compensation for them. Hopefully, they'll participate in the important work this committee is doing as well.

The Chair: I'm going to move along in the interests that there are various perspectives, and let's just leave it at that. I'd encourage members, if they have opinions, input, and advice, to deal with the various subcommittees and stay focused.

Are there any other matters or items that we need to do?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I would like to speak to a matter.

The Chair: Go ahead. I've already indicated that we're moving ahead to Mr. Clark. Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Oh. I'm sorry. My apologies. I don't have the agenda in front of me. I just made some comments with respect to a motion that I would like to propose that I tabled out of respect for Mr. Dang's comments. I just am not sure if we're totally concluded or what other items are on the agenda prior to the close of the meeting.

The Chair: My understanding is that there are no other items on the agenda, but I presume that the earlier motion that you proposed was incorporated into the one by Member Cortes-Vargas. Or is there another point or matter? Clearly, if you'd like to bring that

motion forward again, I guess you have the right to do that, and the committee decides if they're for or against it. So what's your wish, Mr. Cooper?

10:40

Mr. Cooper: I would like to have the committee provide very clear direction to the subcommittee, because if memory serves me correctly, the subcommittee report does not provide a specific recommendation for party size. I stand to be corrected by Member Dang, but if that is not very explicit in the draft of the report, I would propose that the committee provide very clear direction, including a timeline of the end of this year, that they report back with a recommendation for the committee to consider on caucus size and what formulates a party at the LAO and what doesn't.

The Chair: Just a minute. I'd just like to check with Shannon.

I understand that maybe, Mr. Dang, you can help us clarify the issue raised by Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Dang: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly don't want to pre-empt the report coming to the main committee, but I would like to assure Mr. Cooper that all of his concerns are going to be very clearly dealt with in what the report will say.

Mr. Cooper: I withdraw.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I was going to say that being as we have, as it appears, exhausted every item on the agenda, I would wonder if you would entertain a motion to adjourn.

The Chair: I absolutely would.

Derek, are you raising a question?

Mr. Nixon: Chair, there's a motion on the floor.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Again, it's important, especially with this kind of discussion, that involves the . . .

The Chair: Are you speaking to the motion to adjourn?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, sure.

The Chair: It's not a debatable issue. We have a motion on the floor with respect to adjournment.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I would encourage members to vote against it because there's something to very briefly . . .

The Chair: You don't get a vote in here, actually.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I said that I would encourage others to vote against it.

The Chair: All in favour of the motion to adjourn, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. The motion is carried. We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:43 a.m.]

