



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Tuesday, February 12, 2019
9:02 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)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)

* substitution for Erin Babcock

Also in Attendance

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (FCP)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (Ind)

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
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Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

9:02 a.m.

Tuesday, February 12, 2019

[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, if you'd take your seats. Good morning. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Before we get our business started, I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then I'll ask the members who are joining the meeting by teleconference.

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

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

Mrs. Pitt: Angela Pitt, MLA, Airdrie.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chair: Good morning. It's Bob Wanner, Member for Medicine Hat.

Karen.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: And those who have joined us on the line. I believe, Mr. Piquette, you are with us.

Mr. Piquette: Yes, I am, Mr. Chair. Colin Piquette, MLA, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

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

Drever: Good morning, everyone. Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Derek Fildebrandt, Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Luff: Ms Luff, Calgary-East.

The Chair: I understand that Mr. Carson is substituting for Ms Babcock today. Is that correct?

The agenda and briefing documents were posted last . . .

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

The Chair: You're always a surprise in my life, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: A good one, I hope, sir.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

Welcome to you all. Are there any other members?

The meeting agenda and briefing documents were posted last week to the committee's internal website for members' information. If you require copies of these documents, please let Karen know.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, are you calling for approval of the agenda right now? Is that what you're doing, or are you doing something else first?

The Chair: I am going to be moving to the agenda.

Mr. Nixon: I will happily wait until you call for approval of the agenda.

The Chair: The consoles are operated by *Hansard* staff. We are to keep all cellphones, mobile devices on silent for the duration of our meeting. Audio and video of committee proceedings are streamed live on the Internet and are recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio and video access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website. I'm really pleased that people across Alberta can now watch this live. Thank you to staff for achieving that.

To the agenda that has been circulated: Mr. Nixon, did you have any changes or additions?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. I would like to add one topic to the agenda, Mr. Speaker – near the end would be fine – and that is the appointment of the Clerk.

The Chair: Okay.

Cortes-Vargas: In addition, I was just hoping that we could actually swap out item 8 with 7, just swap the order of those on the agenda.

The Chair: Try me again on that.

Cortes-Vargas: Putting item 8 before 7.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nixon: Do you need somebody to move all that, Mr. Speaker? I'd be happy to move that with the changes recommended if that works for you, sir.

The Chair: All in favour of the motion by Mr. Nixon on the agenda as amended, please say aye. Opposed, say no. On the telephone lines? Any opposed?

The motion is carried.

We have the minutes of October 25. Are there any questions or errors or omissions?

If not, would one of the members be prepared to move that the minutes of the October 25 meeting of the special standing committee be adopted as circulated? Anyone? Mr. Dang. All in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. On the phones? Any opposition? The motion is carried.

Item 4, subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders. Who is going to speak to that? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a brief update on the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders. I'm pleased to report that we've completed our review of caucus

funding. I'm sure all members have seen the report, posted on the internal committee website, on the proposed caucus funding model.

I'd like to highlight what the subcommittee considered before determining the proposed model. We considered the need for clarity, consistency, and predictability in determining amounts for caucus funding elements such as the leader's office allowance and research funding. We also considered the need for fairness in funding in terms of what caucuses received compared to other caucuses, where there could be large discrepancies when total amounts of funding are broken down by member and caucus.

We determined that a minimum threshold in terms of the number of members a caucus should have in order to be a recognized opposition party would be helpful. We also determined that maximum amounts for the research funding element would be prudent as economies of scale can be achieved by caucuses in this area. We also considered how other jurisdictions determine and allocate caucus funding, and we considered traditional concepts used in determining caucus funding such as proportionality and the importance of adequately funding and recognizing an Official Opposition caucus even if the Official Opposition has a low number of members.

9:10

I'll highlight what our recommended changes to our caucus funding model are, but I won't get into too much detail as I think the report is pretty concise and clear, especially the chart on page 8 of the report.

We suggest that the minimum threshold in place for a caucus to be considered a recognized opposition caucus be four members. We suggest four members as it is identified as such a threshold in the Legislative Assembly Act. We also suggest that caucuses that do not meet the threshold of four members are not eligible for a leader's office allowance. We recommend that a proportional base element of research funding is allocated to caucuses. We recommend an additional per-member amount of research funding, with a proportional maximum amount for each caucus. I believe page 8 of the document lays this out quite clearly.

We suggest that an Official Opposition caucus and any recognized opposition caucuses receive leaders' office allowances. Government caucuses and caucuses that are not recognized and independents would not be eligible to receive a leader's office allowance. We suggest that in Legislatures where an Official Opposition caucus has fewer than four members, a leader's office allowance be provided. We suggest that a government caucus and an Official Opposition caucus receive a Calgary caucus office allowance. We recommend no changes to the current basic per-member funding amount that's in place.

The subcommittee suggests that our proposed caucus funding model establishes greater certainty, predictability, and fairness. The proposed model would only come into effect after the next election. This means that every caucus will be aware of what the parameters and available caucus funding are going into the next election. The minimum threshold of four members means that there is no longer any ambiguity or moving targets when it comes to determining eligibility for a leader's office allowance for smaller caucuses. We feel our proposed model will eliminate the need for interpretations and exceptions because the proposed funding model establishes predictable and clear guidelines.

I believe that's all I have to report right now, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to take any questions.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any questions to Mr. Dang and the subcommittee? Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can only presume – perhaps if I can ask a question of the members of the Official Opposition, the UCP, here, if they concur in this report. Was the report agreed to by all members of the subcommittee, including the Official Opposition?

The Chair: I'm presuming that to be the case.
Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we determined this model by a consensus model in the subcommittee.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. I think it's kind of remarkable that the NDP and the UCP can't seem to agree on anything except when it comes to trying to create a two-party state in the province. I'm just curious why it is that they seem to be able to agree on this and they can't seem to agree on pretty much anything else. A two-party state in Alberta is not good for democracy. It's not good for our province.

Let's just step through quickly what specifically the changes would mean, recognizing that we're in a transitional time in Alberta, with a number of independent members and a number of smaller parties. Frankly, maybe that's going to be a trend. Maybe we're going to see that going forward. Maybe in this election we're going to see a number of independent members elected, or perhaps over the course of the 30th Legislature we'll see MLAs fly off the edges of the parties that are elected again. That's always entirely possible. Maybe that's exactly what's going to happen or maybe not. Maybe we're going to go back to some stability.

Regardless, I've done some calculations based on the proposed model. In the proposed model, using the fiscal year '17-18 as a baseline, before things started to get a little unsettled here in the Legislature, the government caucus funding would increase under the new model by about 3 per cent. The Official Opposition would stay basically flat, dropping not quite 1 per cent. The Alberta Party caucus, with our three members: our funding would drop 60 per cent. Independent members' funding would drop 37 per cent.

For two major parties to gang up and use their – I was not even going to say majority on this committee, because they're the exclusive and only members of this committee who can vote and bring motions, something you'll remember from the fall sitting of the Legislature. We tried to amend that, with a member of the officially recognized third party, the Alberta Party, on Members' Services, but through some procedural trickery, working together, the UCP and the NDP didn't allow us to do that, so unfortunately I don't have standing on this committee.

I'd just like to say this. In principle, there's a fixed amount of work that's required to hold the government to account, be that for an independent member, a smaller caucus, the Official Opposition, or, ostensibly, the government private members. There's just a fixed amount of work to review the budgets of 21 ministries, to prepare for question period, to prepare for bill debates.

There's just a fixed amount of work that's required in so doing, so there should be a baseline budget that's reasonable to allow members, either independents or smaller caucuses, to do that, to make sure that – I just want to read a quick quote, Mr. Speaker, from October 2, 2013. An hon. member said, "What I want to do is make sure that . . . the opposition parties and the government are able to do their job and [that they] have the resources that they need to do it." That was by Brian Mason, the now Government House Leader, when, at the time, this committee was attempting to reduce some budgets. Of course, as you grow the caucus, you attract more research dollars. Fair enough. But there is that base amount of work.

My proposal and recommendation to this committee would be to consider establishing two as the number of MLAs required for official party status, and this is what I also presented to the subcommittee when I was given the opportunity to do that. It makes sense for leader allowance, for research budgets, and caucus budgets. What I want to emphasize, however, is that the one thing I do agree with in this recommendation is that four MLAs should be the limit, as currently laid out in the Legislative Assembly Act, which relates to MLA compensation, so getting an additional salary for leader or whip or House leader. I don't think that should kick in until a minimum of four MLAs.

Let me just make sure that I say that in another way. My argument for official party status for two members is not an attempt to increase any sort of salary for any member who would be in a two-member caucus. I want to just be very, very clear about that.

There's a lot of precedent for this. It dates back to 1982, when a two-member caucus led by a man named Grant Notley attracted official party status and the funding that went along with that. In 1986 the Representative Party, a two-member caucus which was the remnants of Social Credit, was the fourth party in the Legislature, attracted official party status and the funding that goes along with that.

The Chair: Excuse me. What year was that?

Mr. Clark: Nineteen eighty-six.

Mr. Nixon: It was also Official Opposition.

Mr. Clark: In 1986 the Representative Party was the fourth party in the Legislature. The NDP was a 16-member caucus, I think, in '86 and then the Liberals, and then the fourth party was the Representative Party. In 1997 the two-member NDP was granted official party status. In 2001 the two-member NDP: same thing. In 2008 the two-member NDP, featuring Brian Mason and Rachel Notley as the two-member caucus: that two-member caucus was also given a seat on every standing committee of the Legislative Assembly, including Members' Services, which is different from where we are now with the Alberta Party.

Let me just be clear, Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up these comments, that the Alberta Party will not always be a small party in the Legislature. We aspire to be government. I think we're going to have a big impact in this upcoming election. I don't anticipate that we're going to be less than four members in the next Legislature. I'm arguing that there is an opportunity for this committee to establish a baseline that is going to last generations, that's also going to be in keeping with how this Assembly has governed itself previously. The model we have now makes, I think, a lot of sense.

The cuts, not just to small caucuses but, in particular, to independent members, I think, are especially egregious. We're cutting \$70,000, or about 37 per cent, out of the budget of an independent member, which makes absolutely no sense. It's basically one staffer. All I can think is that the reason for this is for the two main parties to try to create a two-party state in this province. I don't think it's good for democracy, I don't think it's good for Alberta, and I would urge the committee to consider an amendment to restore funding back to the model that it was previously, with two-member caucuses receiving official party status.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Clark, for your comments. I think that it's important that we can recognize

that the formula is not perfect. There, in fact, is no perfect formula, so I think that arriving at a formula is very important. I think that certainly Mr. Clark has highlighted some precedents that have been used for additional parties inside the Assembly in the past. What he failed to do was talk about the size of the other parties in all of those cases. I also would contend that I find it interesting that with respect to leader allowances Mr. Clark is willing to accept that four is a good size, but two is a good size when there are other benefits.

9:20

My point is that there is no perfect formula moving forward, whether it's two or whether it's four, and I think that what is key here is that we agree that none of this affects the current Legislature. As such, every party moving forward will know exactly what the rules of engagement are. It will not be, "Well, this is what happened in '82 and '86, so it should be what happens now," because all of that was done under the ambiguity of no clear direction. What is imperative is that we provide that clear direction moving forward.

This has nothing to do with a two-party system and has everything to do with recognizing that in order to have the benefits of being a party, you actually need more than just a couple of people who happen to get elected together at the same time. For example, the situation in Ontario, where they only have about 20 per cent more members than we do: in order to be a party, you need nine members of the Legislative Assembly. It's about 20 per cent more members, and under Mr. Clark's case it would be almost five times the number of members that he is asking for to be a recognized party. There's lots of other jurisdictional information that would lead us to say that four is a reasonable number. Again, it has nothing to do with the big parties picking on the little parties, because there is no change to the current status quo. I think that it's important that we go ahead and move forward with the report.

I also would say that identifying independent members – there are many ways that independent members can or could potentially gain significant resources by pooling their resources but functioning independently, and then they would be disproportionately benefited to what other members would be. I think we need to be very cautious about how we support independent members because we run the risk of creating a system that is unfair. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we need to create some levels of equality. Currently, independent members are already more equal than other private members, but those private members function as private members and not as members of the government. I think that we just need to be very cautious with how we move forward on funding independent members as well, that they are not then becoming more equal than those who have chosen to be part of the party system.

So I am in support of the report as it is presented. I'll be voting in favour of it, in particular because it creates clarity for you, Mr. Speaker, or the next Speaker, whoever that may be, on exactly how funding is going to work.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe Mr. Clark raises some interesting points, but I believe that when we look at this holistically, the public expects rules for MLAs and caucuses that are consistent, transparent, and fair. As Mr. Clark has illustrated, over the last few years and indeed longer, there's been a lack of clear policies, which has led to ad hoc decisions and unfair funding, in some cases with independent members receiving as much as two times the funding as other independent members. That's not fair.

As a consequence, we've looked to funding in other provinces, reviewed our legislation, and consulted with members with a view to putting in place clear rules, that come into place after the next

election, that we think are fair. We've decided also that to ensure that consistency, we're not making changes in the middle of a mandate, which is why it's coming into effect after the next election. At the same time, all parties will go into the election knowing what thresholds and funding will be in place after the next election.

We think it's imperative that the public be assured that rules such as these are in place to safeguard their tax dollars, and that's what these rules are intended for. I think that we've designed a consistent system that will be something that is clear going forward, and I think the ad hoc system that Mr. Clark described earlier is not what Albertans want when we're talking about tax dollars.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Derek Fildebrandt here.

The Chair: Yes, Derek. Go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll thank Mr. Clark for his comments. I'll agree with many of them and will build on them. Mr. Chair, what we're seeing today is, again, continued collusion between the government and Official Opposition parties to monopolize all voice and all power in Alberta's democratic arena. We saw it in the last session of the Legislature, where the Tories and NDP caucuses colluded together to make it illegal for members not from their two parties to speak to motions about committee assignments, to ban all representation from the members not in the Tory or NDP caucuses from even participating as voting members of this committee. We can see exactly why: so that they could hold secret, behind-closed-door meetings to rig the system and game the system in their favour, to shut all other voices out. They're doing it again here today, with explicit collusion, to monopolize all voices and resources of the Legislature.

I think they are doing this because they are afraid, and I think it is, frankly, a cowardly move to limit the voice of other MLAs in the Legislature. There are already natural and inherent advantages to the government caucus and natural and inherent advantages to the Official Opposition caucus. The government caucus is given the right to control the agenda of the Legislature; the Official Opposition is given preferential speaking rights. They are already given financial advantages in both cases, but now it's not good enough. They want to cut out the ability of virtually anyone else to speak. They're trying to send a message: you don't need MLAs who can think more independently or who can vote and speak for themselves. They're saying that the only way that you can be an MLA in this Legislature is to be a part of one of the two caucuses which they presume will be made up of people who are not free and independent to speak their minds.

Now, we've done some number crunching here. I'm happy to share the numbers if those want, but according to the numbers we've got, this backroom deal between the Tories and NDP will give a raise to the budgets of government members of a little less than \$100,000 and a raise to the Official Opposition of just over \$49,000. Even if there was already a recognized party in the Legislature, because of what they're doing with research budgets, it would actually cut the funding. If we had a party in the Legislature right now that met their definition of a recognized party of four members, that caucus would still see its budget savaged, down \$183,000. For caucuses of under four members right now, it'll see their budgets slashed nearly in half; the same with independents.

9:30

Now, I believe there's an important principle that every single MLA should have the same resources to do their job. It doesn't matter if there's NDP or UCP or Alberta Party, FCP, Liberal, PC, or independent after their name. It doesn't matter. Every MLA should have the same resources because when MLAs work together

in caucus, they can pool their resources and build that economy of scale. If you have a single-member caucus or an independent caucus, you can only have about one and a half to maybe two staff members, and those two people have to do everything. They have to do committee research, they have to do policy research, they've got to do the communications, they've got to do staffing, and they've got to do HR whereas the larger caucuses have an economy of scale to spread the work around significantly more lightly.

There are already significant financial advantages in MLAs working together as caucuses. But to then say that in addition to the economy of scale, smaller caucuses should have fewer resources per MLA than other parties, that is an incredibly arrogant and cowardly attempt to silence their ability to be effective.

There are only two caucuses in the entire Legislature that have even bothered to produce detailed alternative budgets. Those are the two smallest caucuses in the Legislature. The Official Opposition, with greatly more resources, can't be bothered to do so. Smaller caucuses: we have to be everywhere. We've got to do all the more work with fewer MLAs. We've got to do all the more work with less staff, but we still need to have some staff who can do the work. Now they're proposing that, effectively, single-member caucuses and independents will essentially have one staffer each, one staff member, and not that much more for other caucuses under four members.

This is similar to what the Progressive Conservatives did to the Wildrose before the 2012 election. They tried to game the system and rig it in a way so that the Wildrose Party, which hadn't elected people in the general election before but had elected someone in the by-election and subsequently had three MLAs from the government caucus join it but their leader wasn't in the House – the Progressive Conservative government at the time went out of their way to try to ensure that the Wildrose caucus pre-2012, even though it had four members, was not allowed to receive a leader's office budget. It was a petty attempt to target a party that they viewed as an electoral threat.

In this case you now have the two establishment parties, the NDP and the Tories, who are now facing a growing number of smaller parties taking away votes from them, potentially, in the coming election from different areas of the political spectrum, and they don't like people's choices getting messy. They want people to choose between option A and option B, vanilla and French vanilla. Now, Albertans are much more diverse and much more intelligent than they're being given credit for here, so this is a pretty blatant attempt to limit the choices of Albertans and to limit the ability of MLAs to represent their constituencies.

Unfortunately, there is no way for me or Mr. Clark or anyone else, not with the two establishment parties here, to put forward a motion against this because the two parties colluded in the last session of the Legislature to make it difficult for anyone to even discuss this in the Legislature, an unprecedented use of closure before any debate had taken place whatsoever, a very shameful point in the democracy in this province.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

Mr. Fildebrandt: But if the members of this committee . . .

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . have any sense of decency and fairness and honour . . .

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . they will reject this report . . .

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: ... so that every MLA in the Alberta Legislature ...

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt.

I've heard a point of order, which really doesn't apply in the same manner here as it does in the Chamber, but your point, Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Well, just to clarify, under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) as well. I'd love to continue listening to Mr. Fildebrandt's comments, but he continues to, one, accuse people of collusion, which certainly is problematic and not true. Second, he continues to say that he's not allowed to speak as a private member inside the Assembly, which is also absolutely ridiculous and false but something that he continues to say. I don't know if he's not showing up to the Assembly to be able to speak or what's going on, but all private members can speak any time in the Assembly.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, yes.

I was going to ask, Mr. Fildebrandt, that you make your point, and I'm going to allow you to continue. But while the same rules as Mr. Nixon identified don't necessarily apply in committee, nonetheless words like "collusion" – and I'm trying to find other words, adjectives that you may have used – are not very productive. Share your point more respectfully and with a higher degree of information rather than accusation. So I ...

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Fildebrandt: If I could speak to the point of order.

The Chair: I'm going to get you to speak to the item. Move on and address ...

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I have a right to speak to the point of order first.

The Chair: Well, no. The rules don't necessarily apply in the same way, Mr. Fildebrandt. I'd just ask you to move on to the point and address the issue that's under discussion. I'm going to give you the time you need, so let's address the policy issue that's being recommended. I just would ask that you be cautious about the use of your language as we move forward. Please continue.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, well, I'm nearly done with my point, but I have to address the term "collusion": two parties meeting behind closed doors in a secret meeting, which everyone else is forbidden from participating in, to come up ...

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: ... with an agreement that affects everybody else ...

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: That sounds like collusion to me, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Nixon said that he's got the right to speak in the Legislature. He himself moved an ...

The Chair: How do I ...

Mrs. Sawchuk: Do you want me to mute him?

The Chair: Yeah.

Derek, thank you for sharing the information about the definition of collusion. I'm more informed. You said that you were moving to closure. There are several other people who wish to speak. Again, I ask you to go back to the substance of the issue that you want to address. I think you said that you were coming to closure, so I'm going to give you the opportunity again to finish the substantive point that you wanted the committee to hear. Continue, Derek, without any more definitions, without any of those embellishing adjectives, please. Thank you. Go ahead again.

Mr. Fildebrandt: There are similar overtones to this move from the two establishment parties that shut out the smaller parties as there was when the Progressive Conservative government pre-2012 tried to keep the Wildrose caucus pre-2012 from receiving the same resources as other parties of the same size, but in this case this is more of a blanket attack on the ability of all smaller caucuses to do their jobs.

Now, not that I expect a response, but I would ask members of the Tory and NDP caucuses present if they believe that MLAs should receive less funding, in some cases dramatically less funding, to do their job as an MLA just because of the name of the caucus that comes after their name. I think it's an important point that every MLA in the Legislature, who is elected by Albertans, is equal. Regardless of what party they are elected with, they are equally legitimate before the law and before their constituents and have an equally important job to do.

To NDP members in particular: I would say to you that what goes around comes around. You were once a very small party with very few people. Don't be surprised if you find yourself out in the cold one day, but now you're in a position of strength, where you can dictate the terms to others. To Tory members: I will tell you that you are not entitled to power; you're not owed anything. You are not guaranteed to be government. All members of this Legislature ...

9:40

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Who is that, please?

Mr. McIver: It's Ric McIver.

The Chair: Mr. McIver, could I ask you to identify that you joined the meeting?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I thought I did some time ago.

The Chair: Would you please introduce yourself for the record?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I'm just wrapping up here.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt ...

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I was just going to request that you ask the member speaking now to actually address what's before the committee. It's a wonderful speech he's giving – I'm very entertained by it – but I was hoping that you might request that he address the matter before the committee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the comments from Mr. McIver are taking longer than the conclusion of my remarks.

The Chair: Mr. McIver, could you please identify yourself for the record?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. MLA Ric McIver, Calgary-Hays, friend of the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think, Mr. Fildebrandt, you said that . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, there's no point of order, and I'm trying to complete my remarks.

The Chair: And I'm going to allow you to do that. You did not make any of those other explanations on this last point. You said that you were into closure. Please do so. Are you finished?

Mr. Fildebrandt: No. While there are no members on this committee allowed, without party whips stopping them from doing so, to put forward a motion against this report, I think this report goes in the opposite direction. If the report wants to establish some kind of consistency, that would be appropriate except that this is trying to consistently silence the voices of smaller parties and smaller caucuses and independents in the Legislature. If the members have the courage of their convictions, the kind of convictions they stood with in the last election, from both parties, they will throw this report away and replace it with a resource funding formula that treats every single MLA, regardless of what party they're in, equally.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Derek.

Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to be brief here in my final comments. I just want to remind members of the NDP and the UCP caucuses that this is not a good look for either of you. The NDP and the UCP couldn't agree that it's cold outside today, yet they somehow managed to get together on this when it's in their mutual interest to hold back smaller parties and independent members. It's fundamentally unfair, and if Albertans hate something, it's unfairness. The structure that we have in place today is based on Alberta historical practice dating back to 1982, when Grant Notley was given this funding. If it's good enough for Grant Notley, it should be good enough for Rachel Notley. This is a question of fairness, and I would suggest that this is not going to play well.

The Chair: Greg – I think you know – try to avoid, if you can, the use of individuals' names here, please.

Mr. Clark: Fair enough. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Look, the basic principle here is that private members get the resources that they need to do the job. That's been recognized for three decades or more in this Assembly. We should not be looking to other provinces. We're not trying to create the Ontario Legislature. This is not Queen's Park; this is the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This is the way we have done things in Alberta, but these two parties have come together in an attempt, I think a very naked attempt, to create a two-party state in Alberta. I think the NDP is worried about losing this election and think maybe they can win the next one if they can go back and forth. That's what's happening here, and I think we have to call that out for what it is.

I'm not saying that we don't have rules. We absolutely must have rules, and there should be clarity, but I think the precedent that has been set in Alberta is already clear. We ought to codify that precedent in the standing orders of the Assembly, which is what this committee is structured and intended to do. If I had the right to

move a motion here, I would do that, but I don't have that right, so I can't. But I would say that those rules need to be fair and consistent with Alberta traditions and practices. I would also disagree with the assessment that it's unfair, as Mr. Dang said, to provide a baseline of resources that you shouldn't fall below. All members, especially for organized political parties, regardless of their size, if they're two or greater, should have the resources required just to hold the government to account and to stand up for our constituents.

To Mr. Cooper's point that no system is perfect: no, but some are better than others. Every system, every choice, every set of rules has consequences one way or the other, and the stated consequences of this particular choice don't hold water. We know that the real reason you're doing this is to create a two-party system to the best of your ability.

Again, you know, as has been said before, the NDP has been a small party for many years. I just would speak to the NDP staffers either in the room or out there listening. One day you may run to become an MLA, and you may find yourself as a member of that small caucus, and you may remember that on February 12, 2019, when the Members' Services Committee and your own party created a situation where you didn't end up with the resources that you needed. It's fundamentally unfair and wrong, notwithstanding the fact that it's a go-forward decision. There are potentially 24 hours left in this Legislature. The NDP can call an election at any time, so to say that it only applies to the next Legislature also doesn't hold water.

If I could move a motion to change this, I would. I can't, but I would really encourage both the NDP and the UCP to reconsider this and to do what's right for Alberta and to do what's right for democracy.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I'd like to address a few of the things that Mr. Fildebrandt and Mr. Clark brought up. I think when we talk about the caucus funding, it's really important to understand that we have ensured that there is a base funding amount for every single member that they receive and that is there to ensure that every single member is able to perform the duties that they need to do. We'd also like to point out that ministers, for example, do not receive any of that base funding. It only applies to private members. So we're trying to make sure that when we look at the system, it's a fair system that means that every single member has the funding they require.

Now, Mr. Clark spoke at length about how at different times over the last 30 years, 40 years, there have been different systems, in some cases with two-member parties being recognized and in some cases, as in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, one-member parties being recognized. I believe, to Mr. Clark's point, that shows that those precedents can change and are ad hoc and are not necessarily clear, consistent, and fair for all Albertans. I think when Albertans look at how we receive our funding, they want to know that there is a set of rules such that they can say: we know what taxpayers are getting the dollar value for.

I think that what we've tried to present here is that system. We understand that definitely that means that in some cases in the past different decisions that were made wouldn't apply moving forward, but that is the point of trying to have this subcommittee put together a fair system that we think is comparable to those in other jurisdictions, so that we know that Albertans are getting reasonable value for their money here.

I think it's going to be something that I support moving forward as I think the subcommittee did good work on this. We did do a crossjurisdictional analysis. We did look at historical precedents in

Alberta, and we did consider all these factors, Mr. Speaker. But I think it's important, when we look at this, that we say: this is a system that is in line with what is in the Legislative Assembly Act, the four-member threshold. It's in line with what is done in other areas in the Alberta Legislature, and it's something that allows for a system that people can look at and say: if we elect four members or we elect two members or we elect 54 members, we know exactly what each caucus will receive. I think that's what Albertans expect and deserve as we move forward with this committee.

I'll hold my comments there, but I hope we can come to a vote on this soon.

The Chair: Ms Luff.

Ms Luff: Thank you. I will try to be brief because I think Mr. Clark and Mr. Fildebrandt have covered most of the ground. I do just want to say, you know, that I commend the work of the subcommittee. I know they have put a lot of work into this, and coming up with a firm funding formula I think is important. I think it's important to have some level of baseline where people know what is expected.

However, I will say that it does appear that both the Official Opposition and the NDP are trying to make it harder for independent members and for smaller caucuses to do their job, and their job is to hold the government to account. And, quite frankly, the job of private members in the government caucus is also to hold the government to account, but we know that that's not necessarily what they use their caucus funding for.

To make a choice to reduce funding for independent members – the problem for me isn't so much the funding as it is the threshold to be officially recognized as a party. If you need four people to be officially recognized as a party, it changes the amount of opportunity that you have to speak in the Legislature, and it changes the amount of opportunity you have to represent your constituents. One of the main things that you have as an independent member or an opposition caucus member is the ability to ask questions during question period, which is determined by whether or not you're considered an official party. For example, the Alberta Party gets to ask two questions per member per week whereas independent members and single caucus members only get to ask one question per week, and that's determined by whether or not you're an official party.

9:50

Putting the threshold at four, I think in some cases – for example, in this Legislature because there is a quite sizable Official Opposition – is probably reasonable. But in other Legislatures that have existed in the past – for example, in the 27th Legislature I believe there were nine Liberals, four Wildrose, and two New Democrats, so it made sense for the two New Democrats to be recognized as an official party in that case.

When you look at historical precedence, Alberta is different than other provinces. It has a tendency to elect very large government majorities, and when you have a very large majority, it's even more important for there to be a strong voice of independent and small-caucus members. So when you make it fixed that you have to have four people in order to have those advantages of being a recognized caucus, you are really limiting people's ability and MLAs' ability to hold their government to account.

In terms of Albertans wanting clarity to know how much money each caucus is getting, quite frankly, I don't think there are a whole lot of Albertans who pay exact attention to how much money each caucus is getting for research, but I do think they expect that every MLA is treated fairly. I do think they expect that every MLA has appropriate opportunity to hold the government to account and to

ask questions that reflect their constituents' needs, and I do think that they expect that MLAs will act in the best interest of their constituents. When you're reducing the amount of money that independent members have, you're reducing their ability to do that.

I do appreciate the work that the subcommittee has done. I appreciate that they've made an attempt to provide clarity, but I do think that four is too high. I think that flexibility is necessary for occasions when there are very small Official Oppositions. So I would echo the things that – and I think, you know, it's very clear that both the UCP and the NDP currently don't feel there is a place for independents in the Legislature. They've said so in the Legislature. I don't remember exactly what it was that I said, but I believe I recall the official government House leader saying that there is no place for those people on committees. They said there's no place for us, which is, frankly, insulting and also problematic because previously when there have been small caucuses, they have been given places on all of the committees, including this one.

I think what you're saying right now is what happens when you exclude small parties from important committees like the Members' Services Committee, like the Public Accounts Committee. Quite often independent voices and small-caucus voices are the ones who are telling the truth because they are not trying to do everything they can to get re-elected.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Luff: I feel like – I apologize.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you for that.

Ms Luff: We are trying to be more – no, I don't apologize. We are trying to . . .

The Chair: Well, hon. member. Hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Luff: You can call point of order all you want.

The Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: The implication is that all other members aren't telling the truth, and we all know that that is not the case. We all know that it is improper to imply that another – or in this case, basically, say directly that all other members are not telling the truth. Ms Luff needs to apologize and withdraw the statement because it is not going to create order inside this committee.

I would just add that the standing orders and the rules of the Chamber do apply to committees, and I would expect that those rules would be applied here in the committee as they ought to be applied both here and in the Chamber.

The Chair: I agree.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll speak on the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Ms Luff, leaving the implication that other members are not telling the truth, whether it's in the Chamber or within the committee, is, in my view, a major accusation, which is not acceptable in the kind of manner in which we have discussions in this Legislature.

I'm going to ask if you have any other major comments to contribute to the discussion, and then I'd like to move along to Mr. Cooper.

Ms Luff: Okay. I will apologize because Mr. Cooper is correct. To say that no one is telling the truth all the time is incorrect, so I

apologize for saying that. I suppose what I intended to say is – and I apologize for using strong language; I feel quite strongly about this – that independent members and small-caucus members are perhaps freer to speak their minds than other members of the Assembly. With regard to telling the truth, no; I believe all members are doing their best to tell the truth all the time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Luff: So I do apologize.

But I think what Mr. Clark and Mr. Fildebrandt have said is legitimate. I think that we should allow for two-member caucuses to be recognized as official parties, and I think we should be doing as much to ensure that every party has equal funding as any other party. I will disagree with the framework that has been laid out at the present time.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Excellent. Thank you. Thank you, and I appreciate your apology, Ms Luff.

My comments will hopefully be brief. I would just like to state that the current model of precedent actually doesn't accomplish what Mr. Clark and Mr. Fildebrandt are advocating for, which is fairness. The current model makes independent members or members of small caucuses more fair. Mr. Clark and the Alberta Party caucus benefited a significant amount by getting a leader's allowance, which under no precedents prior had been allotted. So he has been treated more fairly, received significantly more resources than any other member, including Dr. Swann, the independent Member for Calgary-Mountain View. What I'm suggesting is that we are actually treated equally.

The other thing that I might just point out is that this has nothing to do with the big parties versus the little parties because I, too, understand the challenges that come with small parties and advocating for party status or not. But what Mr. Clark is advocating for is something that doesn't actually exist in any other jurisdiction in the country of similar size. When it comes to party status, the House of Commons is 12; the Assembly of British Columbia, exact same number of MLAs, is four; the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba is four; New Brunswick, with significantly fewer members, is five; Newfoundland, significantly – significantly – fewer members, is two; Nova Scotia, significantly fewer, is two; Ontario is eight; Quebec is 12. My point being that what they're advocating for is something that doesn't exist anywhere else.

They're also suggesting that without staff they can't do their job. Well, that is not a reasonable expectation of a member. Yes, there are a variety of workloads, but Albertans expect us to do that as well.

So I think that the compromise that we've reached, being four members, affecting the next Legislature is fair and reasonable. I encourage all parties to go out there and elect four if this is a big concern for you. Now we have a framework which addresses and treats all parties fairly as they come into the next Assembly.

The Chair: Mr. Dang, I'm hearing arguments around the table that we've already heard. Mr. Dang, I think we need to move to – we have a number of major items here today, other items.

Mr. Dang: I'd like to perhaps just clear up a misconception that I believe Ms Luff had.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I'd like you to turn my mic on.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My purpose is to clear up a misconception that Ms Luff had. Actually, in fact, independent members would receive the same amount of funding that they do right now. If Ms Luff were to run as an independent again and were elected, she would receive the same amount of funding.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

Mr. Dang: The change would be, in fact, where leaders' allowances would be changed under recognized opposition caucuses or for independent members. I believe that Ms Luff was perhaps misinformed about that or perhaps did not read the document correctly. In fact, the \$78,907 basic, per-member funding does not change at all in our proposal compared to what is currently in place.

10:00

The Chair: Could I just ask you to hold there a minute?

Mr. Fildebrandt . . . [interjection] I hear you, Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, there is an inaccuracy there, and I would like Mr. Dang to withdraw his comments.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Funding for independent members . . .

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt, please.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . is actually cut by over \$70,000 in their annual budget.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Fildebrandt. You had a point that you wanted to make, and it was what?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. It was a point of order regarding just how factual his comments are. I think Mr. Dang was referring to leaders' allowances, but if he is referring to independents' budgets, they are cut by over \$70,000 a year as the new formula would drastically slash the research funding available for independent and small-caucus MLAs, with funding reallocated, at least partially, towards the government caucus and the Official Opposition caucus. But he would be quite mistaken to say that the funding formula for independents has not changed. It's cut by more than 70 per cent, which is a dramatic change. I would ask Mr. Dang to withdraw his comments or to clarify that his comments are referring to the leader's allowance, but with reference to the research budgets for independent MLAs, they are drastically cut.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt, I stand to be corrected, but I believe I heard Mr. Dang say that the funding per member at \$78,000 was the matter that was consistent now and into the future.

Mr. Fildebrandt: If I'm correct, Mr. Dang said that funding for independents has not changed except funding for leaders' allowances. That is very much not the case. Research budgets have been drastically cut.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: If Mr. Dang would like to either withdraw it or to clarify his remarks.

The Chair: I think he did.

Mr. Dang: I believe, Mr. Speaker, that you were correct. I was referring to the basic, per-member funding, and I did reference that in my comments.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. Just to be really clear, the net result is a \$70,000 cut, because although you're being a bit overprecise, if we're being generous, the research funding was cut from \$112,724 per year for independent members down to \$42,000 in the new model. That is very clear from appendix A of your document, Mr. Dang. I think that's something to be aware of. So independent members are being cut by 37 per cent. A cut is a cut is a cut.

There's one piece here that's escaped scrutiny through all of this, the fact that the government caucus is going to be allocated \$90,000 for a Calgary office. The government caucus can't use McDougall Centre in Calgary? You can and should, and frankly so should the Official Opposition, in the same way that the government caucus and the Official Opposition and all private members are in the Federal Building here in Edmonton and we manage to somehow not lead to problems. The fact that you're adding \$90,000 to the government caucus budget for a Calgary office: frankly, I would suggest we should cut the Calgary office for the Official Opposition and grant the Official Opposition and, frankly, all private members an opportunity for office space in an existing government building, in McDougall Centre.

You know, if we're trying to be fiscally responsible and set an example for Albertans, the fact that you're trying to kind of sneak in a Calgary caucus office for what often turn out to be fairly partisan purposes, quote, unquote, outreach, is frankly shocking, which results in a budget increase for the government.

The Chair: Greg, the "sneak in" stuff is not necessary, you know.

Mr. Clark: I will withdraw that comment.

The Chair: Let's do this. I'd like to move to closure of this discussion. Are there any new, additional points that can be made that are substantive in nature and will have a major impact on the discussion? Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I promise this is it. I just want to emphasize the fact that even if there is a four-member caucus in the new model, it represents a substantial budget cut. To say that if you get to four members, life is good, it is still a significant budget cut compared to the current model. You can't tell me that you're not trying to disadvantage smaller parties even if they meet the threshold of four members.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, I have just two questions that I'd like to direct to the chair of the subcommittee. The first is on the members who had expressed opinions on this matter. I believe you said that you had listened to all of them in the subcommittee. Is that correct?

Mr. Dang: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: At any time in the subcommittee did you consider the 5 per cent issue, which is in the legislation? I suspect that you have and determined that that would not apply in this situation. Correct?

Mr. Dang: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. We did determine that the 5 per cent threshold in the Legislative Assembly Act was unfair to smaller caucuses. We believed that in some cases you could have parties, like Mr. Clark's perhaps, receive more than four seats but not 5 per cent of the overall vote. We determined that, in the matter of fairness, they must receive that additional recognition.

The Chair: So, hon. members . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to that point very briefly.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt, I think it's time that we move along.

Mr. Fildebrandt: No. It's related to the 5 per cent threshold being discussed right now. I have a very brief remark.

The Chair: Well, it better be brief, Derek, because I'm going to mute it if it isn't brief. Go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Now, I'm doubtful this has much to do with fairness, the 5 per cent threshold. If the 5 per cent threshold had been applied, the Official Opposition caucus would be defunded because it received zero per cent of the vote in the last election. I am rather questioning if the application of a 5 per cent of the vote threshold had anything to do with fairness. It had to do with getting . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Derek.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . the Official Opposition . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Derek.

Let's put a mute on that.

Thank you, Derek, for that. I believe we've had more than ample, full discussion on this issue.

I would ask if members are prepared to move interim report No. 2 of the subcommittee, and I'm going to ask Karen to read it into the record.

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

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve interim report No. 2 of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders and the recommendation for a caucus funding model to take effect on polling day for the provincial general election for the 30th Legislature as distributed and that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee.

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

The motion is carried.

The next item on the agenda, I think, is 4(b).

I think we are back to you, Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd perhaps like to start by saying that this is another piece of work that the subcommittee did on the regulations, variances, and exemptions order. I'd like to outline the work and considerations that the subcommittee undertook and perhaps provide a little bit of background for members who are not so familiar.

For those that are not as familiar with this order, these exemptions were approved in the 1980s following the passage of the Legislative Assembly Act, which expressly authorizes the Members' Services Committee to order that any regulation, order, or directive under the Financial Administration Act or the Public Service Act be deemed "inapplicable to, or be varied in respect of, the Legislative Assembly Office." The rationale for the provision stems from the general principle that the legislative branch is independent from the executive branch. One example of why this order is needed is that without appropriate exemptions in place, the ability of the LAO to execute staff contracts would be significantly impaired or limited.

The order contained a number of very outdated references to regulations and directives. The subcommittee recommends that the

regulations exemption and variance order be amended so that the exemptions are updated and maintained with the correct information regarding current directives and regulations. The report clearly explains this.

The subcommittee also recommends that the LAO draft and provide policies on severance payments and travel expenses to this committee for review no later than six months after the commencement of the 30th Legislature. The rationale here, Mr. Speaker, is that the subcommittee feels that if exemptions are to continue, then clear policies must be developed and presented to the Members' Services Committee for review. We believe that this will promote greater transparency and consistency and establish clear guidelines for LAO employees.

It is also the subcommittee's recommendation that if draft policies are not in place within six months of the commencement of the 30th Legislature, this committee then again review the exemptions made under sections 2 and 4 of the order, which pertain to severance and travel expenses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

10:10

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dang.

Are there any questions or comments with respect to this item? Any members on the phone have any questions or comments?

I would ask that Karen read the motion into the record.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A suggested draft motion is that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve interim report No. 3 and the recommendations contained therein of the subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders as distributed and that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee.

The Chair: All in favour of the motion . . .

Mrs. Sawchuk: We need a member to move the motion.

The Chair: Right. I guess that would be important, that we would have a member to move the motion. I'm presuming that's Mr. Dang.

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

The Chair: All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Those on the line? Anyone opposed? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

I'm going to check with the committee before we move to the next item. I'm looking at the possibility of a break here soon.

A number of additional motions may be proposed to implement the committee's recommendation to address amendments to the regulations exemption and variance order and to direct the drafting of a policy relating to LAO officers and employees in matters of severance payments and reimbursement of travel, meal, hospitality, and other expenses.

Mr. Dang: Perhaps I would make a motion that we maybe take a five-minute recess.

The Chair: Before we deal with this motion? This is just the draft order that needs to be signed off, which brings closure to the matter.

Mr. Dang: Oh. Let's do that first.

The Chair: That's what I was hoping we would do.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Sorry. What is the purpose of a recess right now?

The Chair: I am needing a recess. Derek, I won't elaborate . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: That's good enough for me.

The Chair: . . . on the reasons why I might want that.

I'm going to ask Karen just for the record to read the motion.

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

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed Regulations Exemption and Variance Amendment Order (No. 1) as distributed.

The Chair: Mr. Dang has already moved that, I believe. Is that correct?

Mr. Dang: Yes.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, all in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed, please say no. Anyone on the telephones opposed to the motion? None.

The motion is carried.

Now could we take a five-minute recess?

Mr. McIver: I'll move a five-minute recess, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: That's good.

[The committee adjourned from 10:14 a.m. to 10:22 a.m.]

The Chair: Hon. members, if we could reconvene.

As a fallout of the subcommittee two motions need to be considered. The first is with respect to the severance payment policy. Again, as was outlined earlier, these are matters that make an alignment with the decisions made by the Members' Services Committee. I'll get Karen to read the motion.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion repeats what's contained in the subcommittee's interim report, that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct Legislative Assembly Office administration to prepare a draft policy for the committee's consideration addressing the payment of severance to Legislative Assembly Office officers and employees, including a maximum number of months of severance that may be paid, and that if such a policy is not in place within six months of the commencement of the 30th Legislature, the committee review the exemption made under section 2 of the regulations exemption and variance order.

The Chair: Is there a member who's prepared to move that motion?

Mr. Dang: I'll move it.

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

The motion is carried.

The second one is, again, the same process-related item. It's with respect to reimbursement policy, and I would ask that Karen read that into the record.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct Legislative Assembly Office administration to prepare a draft policy for the committee's consideration concerning the reimbursement of travel, meals, hospitality, and other expenses incurred by Legislative Assembly Office officers and employees in carrying out Assembly business and that if such a policy is not in place within six months of the commencement of the 30th

Legislature, the committee review the exemption made under section 4 of the regulations exemption and variance order.

The Chair: Mr. Dang again: did I see you move the motion?

Mr. Dang: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Sorry.

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

The motion is carried.

I believe we are now moving towards item 5, the Legislative Assembly Office budget estimates and strategic business plan. If you would just allow me, as an introduction before turning it over to staff, I would like to thank them for their efforts in the amount of work that takes place to prepare and submit these kinds of reports and documents. There's been considerable evolution and change within the LAO these last three to four years. One of those major accomplishments, achievements – and I want to thank staff for doing that – is to put some measurable outcomes into our plan that all of the staff can address and that the people that they serve, the Members of the Legislative Assembly as well as the staff of the various offices as well as the caucuses, can measure against the staff's performance. As a whole, we have made some structural changes, and some of those are ongoing, and I want to compliment the staff for addressing the committee.

All MLAs will have received a survey which they completed and reported. That survey demonstrated that there was a high degree of satisfaction with the various changes, improvements that have been made in the LAO. I want to thank the members for that. Before I turn it to Cheryl, I would just say that as the chair of this committee and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly I'd like to underline my belief that the very capable staff that we have, committed staff, in all areas is the reason, in spite of all of the divergence that we have.

I am urging that a committee as the 30th Legislature – I believe that we need to find ways of addressing the engagement of our citizens in a new and improved manner so that the confidence of the public and their understanding of the legislative process is more clear than it might be now or has been. I hope that efforts both by the LAO staff and, probably more importantly, by all of us continue to find ways to address that public information and public engagement.

I'm going to turn the presentation over to Cheryl Scarlett to walk us through and answer any questions that the committee may have.

10:30

Ms Scarlett: Thank you, sir, and good morning to all. I want to thank you all for the opportunity to present this morning. With respect to our 2019-20 strategic business plan, we are very pleased to share with you our strategic business plan for the upcoming year. This is the second year that we've included this plan as part of our budget presentation, and you will note this year, in the materials that were presented to you, that we have redesigned the look of the report and that the report also now includes reporting on a number of outcome measures from the past year.

With respect to the '19-20 report we don't propose reviewing the strategies and outcome measures in detail, but you will note that the goals and objectives have been reframed to prioritize the demands of the LAO as we enter the election cycle. In particular, our number one goal is the development and application of pre-election, election, and postelection protocols and practices. This includes the development and delivery of a wide range of training and orientation materials for new members, staff, and a new Speaker as well as providing ongoing assistance to retiring members. This will ensure that new members, new staff as well as outgoing members and staff

receive prompt, efficient, and professional services as we proceed through the transition to the 30th Legislature.

Before we go into our budget presentation, we would like to report on a number of outcome measures, and the Speaker has made reference to them. In particular, the results from the November 2018 satisfaction survey of members and staff indicated that several branches of the LAO were highly rated, with 85 to 90 per cent of respondents indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided. We'd also like to point out that the statistics for our visitors and public programming are on track to meet or exceed our targets, and we're very pleased to report that 90 per cent of the respondents surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with our events, programming, and visitor centre experience.

We will continue to conduct satisfaction surveys through the 30th Legislature, starting with a postelection survey in the fall of 2019, and we look forward to tracking and reporting our progress on our outcome measures throughout the year and at next year's budget presentation.

More specifically, with respect to the 2019-20 budget estimates, again on behalf of all of us – the Speaker, Acting Clerks, staff of the Legislative Assembly – we appreciate your ongoing support and assistance throughout this year and in the course of this Legislature. Thank you very much. It has been a busy year, and it will be another busy year for our organization with the upcoming provincial election.

Based on our strategic business plan and the direction given by you as a committee, the LAO has provided you with the 2019-20 budget for your consideration. I can assure you that the LAO is keenly aware of the current economic times and the previous direction from committees in terms of restraint. We have discussed our opportunities to continue to provide enhanced services to members and meet our goals set forth in the plan with a hold-the-line budget again for this year.

One of the key messages from last year was to reduce our expenditures related to travel and hosting within the LAO. Reductions in those areas were presented in last year's budget, and we continue to be aware and cognizant of those considerations.

With respect to the LAO branch budgets I can confirm that we will be meeting our 2019-20 planned initiatives within the existing branch budgets and have also identified additional savings for your consideration.

We have been very cognizant to ensure that our support to members and staff in the constituency and caucus offices is our top priority, and as referenced in our business plan, we continue to explore further opportunities to streamline the services that we offer to you.

We also heard feedback from members and staff asking for better support and training after general elections, and significant planning is presently under way to better support you and your staff in the time up to the election and after. In line with the objectives of our strategic business plan, right now programs are being developed to support all outgoing, new, and returning members and their staff. Some initiatives presently under way include updated internal and external websites, information sessions for retiring members, and information sessions for members and staff in support of better understanding of the dissolution guidelines. As well, the LAO is updating our new-member orientation program, that will commence one week after the general election.

To talk more specifically about the budget document that was provided to you, we have included in the budget document overview and highlight pages as a cross-reference for the various areas of the budget. Your package included a copy of the approved parameters and a summary of the budget estimate requesting an approved total voted budget for the LAO in the amount of \$67,712,000.

With your permission I'd like to provide you with a little more detailed overview of the budget estimates, starting with section A, the Legislative Assembly Office branch budgets. As a management team we have spent many hours reviewing the budget and looking closely at our operations, and as already mentioned, I'm happy to confirm that we will be able to accomplish our objectives set out within the existing branch budgets and have identified additional savings of \$84,000 for your consideration. In accordance with the parameters, our budget does not reflect any inflationary adjustments nor any market or merit adjustments for staff.

More specifically, as we move through the pages of the budget, I'd like to start with corporate services. As you know, this year there were some changes to our organization's structure, one of them being that the human resources, financial management, and information technology and broadcast areas have been recognized under the umbrella of corporate services.

Another change related to that was that the records management and FOIP responsibilities have moved to library services. So when you look at the budgets of the financial management of corporate services – financial management, human resources, IT and broadcast – you will see that there is a transfer of funds representative of one position moving to library services, in the amount of \$61,000, to offset costs related to the records management responsibilities that are now being handled by the library. More specifically, on the pages you'll see a reduction of \$31,000 from financial management and \$30,000 from human resources, for a total of \$61,000, which has been transferred to library services. Otherwise, the budgets for human resources, financial management, and IT are unchanged. Our current initiatives continue to be focusing on our upcoming 2018-19 fiscal year-end, which is March 31, in conjunction with many election-related initiatives.

That, then, takes me to library services and records management, and as already referenced, there have been changes, with the addition of records management and FOIP functions. However, all the resulting changes have been offset from within the library services budget and offset by the transfer coming from corporate services.

With respect to parliamentary services, areas of responsibility directly related to the support of House and committee activities are reflected in this budget, as is detailed on the summary page for parliamentary services. In that budget, 82 per cent of the total budget for parliamentary services is related to human resource expenses, with the balance attributed to operational expenses. As noted in the summary, we're projecting some savings related to electronic delivery of communication materials.

10:40

However, there are additional operational expenses related to *Hansard* incurred for the printing of parliamentary publications and the collection of the bound volumes of the committees after each Legislature. Also related to parliamentary services, in 2019 it's Alberta's turn to host the Hansard Association of Canada conference. In addition, Canada will be hosting the Commonwealth Parliamentary conference in 2021, so there will be some expenses that will be incurred next year as a result of that. However, parliamentary services has been able to offset all adjustments and expenses required from within their operational budget and is projecting no increase to the budget that was reflected.

The next tab is visitor services. Visitor services engages the public to become involved in the parliamentary process through participation and tours of the building, educational programs, daily public programming, and special events. Pursuant to the strategic business plan the LAO strives to be proactive, open, and to provide an accessible information source about the Assembly and the

parliamentary democratic process. Included in the estimates presented to you is Alberta Branded. Specifically, as it relates to Alberta Branded, there will be an initiative next year to introduce e-commerce for the 2019-20 year. That being said, you will see that visitor services is also projecting no increase in the budget.

That moves us to the next tab, which is the Speaker's office. Again, this is a status quo budget, with no projected increases in the budget for that area.

Finally, as it relates to the branches of the Legislative Assembly, it brings me to the legislative committees branch. As noted in our summary document, the estimates for legislative committees are projecting a decrease of \$84,000 as a result of reductions within our operational expenses. The budget for this, legislative committees – there are eight standing committees and one special standing committee at this time. We know that in 2019 there will be an additional committee required for the review of the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. At any time special committees can be established. However, taking a look at the budget and based on some savings, we are projecting a decrease of \$84,000.

In summary, section A, the Legislative Assembly Office branch estimates: the LAO has been able to project and identify that we believe we can meet all of our initiatives for the upcoming year within the existing budget and has identified a reduction of \$84,000.

Section B is MLA administration. Last year we identified that the Electoral Boundaries Commission had completed their work and that the LAO no longer needed a budget for the commission. The changes outlined in the Electoral Boundaries Commission report will become effective as of the 30th Legislature. Therefore, pursuant to the approved parameters, components of the member's services allowance have been updated appropriately based on updated electoral and population numbers and information provided by Treasury Board and Finance related to the matrix. At this time we would very much like to thank them for their assistance.

In brief, the 2016-17 Electoral Boundaries Commission report concluded that Edmonton and Calgary should each gain one riding, changing the numbers in Calgary to 26 and Edmonton to 20. However, the overall number of ridings will remain at 87. As well, 83 ridings had a name change and/or a boundary change, which is further broken down to 29 new-name changes and 83 new-boundary changes. The 29th Legislature presently has 51 urban ridings and 36 rural ridings. The 30th Legislature will have 55 urban ridings and 32 rural ridings.

Information was provided to members in advance outlining the methodology for the matrix scoring in appendix A of the briefing notes, and details of the updated new matrix for the new electoral divisions in the 30th Legislature were outlined to you in appendix B.

With respect to caucus funding, based on the decision of the committee earlier in this committee meeting, we are projecting that there is no additional funding required for this budget line.

That brings us, then, to planning and development initiatives. The LAO continues to budget for planning and development initiatives that are essential to the support of House and committee operations and the continuous improvement of services to members and their staff. Some examples of these projects have been referenced in both the parameter document and in the summary page for planning and development. Included in these initiatives will be the continued implementation of the Speaker's regional outreach and indigenous initiatives. Again, in this line there's been no requested increase. It's status quo.

Finally, the election preparedness election contingency. Although referenced earlier, there are additional costs projected for the 2019-20 fiscal year associated with the 2019 election. Significant additional resources both administrative and House related are required to support incoming and outgoing members as well as their

staff. There was considerable discussion at our last meeting about the types of support and assistance that are provided; however, we'd be pleased to speak to this again if further information is required. For this line item the LAO is not asking for any increase over the 2018-19 budget.

In summary, based on the information presented and provided in the budget summary documents, the LAO is seeking your approval of the 2019-20 Legislative Assembly budget estimate in the amount of \$67,712,000.

Already said, we would very much like to thank all the LAO staff who assisted us on this endeavour and who, again, are very cognizant of the pressures and the direction from the committee. Most importantly, on behalf of all of us – the Speaker, Ms Dean, our management group – we would very much like to again thank the members of this committee and all members for their support and assistance.

The Chair: I'll thank you, Cheryl.

I would just like to mention that this committee over the last three to four years, my office as well, was encouraging the update of various systems, communications with members and members' offices and caucuses, and the staff responded to those requests. I think part of the various restructuring initiatives that are taking place and the efforts of all of the staff, including all of the managers and supervisors, has been considerable.

Before turning the table to questions to the committee, I just want to underline an issue and use this as one more opportunity, if I might, to underline to the committee and all MLAs the importance of knowing the consequences of dissolution guidelines that have been sent to you. It's important that we as MLAs are aware of the expectations required of each of us.

I don't know, Cheryl, if there are any key points you'd like to underline on that.

I just wanted to encourage all MLAs and your various caucuses to ensure that the MLAs as well as their staff as well as caucus staff are aware of those requirements.

10:50

Mr. Nixon: I'll be very brief. I just want to thank the LAO again for all their hard work, which I think you've done well, Mr. Speaker, and also for recognizing the tough economic times that we still continue to have in this province and holding the line. I know that's always tough when you're dealing with so many complicated departments and moving parts. I think you did a great job of that. In fact, I don't think he will, but I certainly hope the current NDP Finance minister gives you a phone call and has a look at how you've done that because you've done a great job.

Cortes-Vargas: On a similar note, I know that the Legislative Assembly has been under zeros for a few years now, and we're going into increasing services. You have been able to identify and give examples in your statement of different services that are being put in place, from e-commerce to updating the services between MLA offices and FMAS. Those kinds of things aren't easy to do within finding efficiencies at the same time, so I really applaud the work that you've done in order to do this. I think that we've seen the benefits of that, too. I know that the next year, given the election, is going to be another busy year for you as well and one that takes a toll as well on the staff. I remember coming in last time, and the staff wasn't quite expecting the turnover, and you were moving buildings. I know that we're really grateful for the work that you do to enable us to represent our constituents. So thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I will take the opportunity as well to just echo those sentiments, and my thanks to Ms Scarlett and to everyone in the LAO broadly. I think you do great work. You know, one of the examples is the new expense claim process, the OnTap 2 system. I was part of the pilot for that, and it's fabulous. It really works well. It makes that whole process more efficient, so when we're looking at how it is that we can continue to not just reduce cost but also improve service, it's actually kind of gone both ways. I find, like, it's actually, from a user perspective, more functional. It's just sort of one, I think, of many, many examples that, you know, all branches of the LAO do provide us with some very, very good service.

I do have a question, though, that I'd like to ask you, Ms Scarlett, if I may. The previous versions of this document that we see here, the summary of budget expenses by program, section C, in past years have broken out each caucus budget year over year rather than just rolling it up into a single number. Is that just an artifact of: we don't know what the next Legislature is going to look like? Is that information, a caucus-by-caucus breakdown, available somewhere else, or is that just a new way of doing it?

Ms Scarlett: You are correct. We obviously don't know what the composition will be next Legislature. But, also, given that there was the decision item on the agenda that we have just dealt with, it has been presented this way as we did not know what funding model we'd be going with. So it has been presented as a one-line item.

Mr. Clark: Given the motion that has now passed, I don't know if you had the opportunity to see what the proposed model was, and if so, have you done any calculation on what the total impact on the overall section C for caucus budgets will be going forward based on the new model? Have you had the opportunity to do that?

Ms Scarlett: Correct. In my overview I did present that based on what has been approved now, we do not believe that there will be any increase required to that budget line.

Mr. Clark: But it doesn't go down? You're anticipating that's going to stay roughly the same?

Ms Scarlett: Again, that will depend on the components after the next election.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Just one last question, then. For future versions of this, then, the expectation would be that you'd go back to a model where you break out caucus budgets, going forward in future years?

Ms Scarlett: Correct. It would be our anticipation that we would go back to representing it as we have in the past.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. There's just one new expenditure on that, Greg, that I wanted to just mention. This last year we've had to have another copy machine because there have been so many changes in these last couple of years.

Thank you. I want to emphasize to all of you the importance of your words of encouragement and appreciation to staff. When we're in the midst and heat of this process called politics, sometimes we don't always acknowledge as quickly as we might the appreciation of the people behind the scenes that make this system work so well. So I just want to thank you for the comments at the meeting today and let you know that that is important to all of the staff, to hear you say that.

This may or may not be our final Members' Services Committee meeting, but I would just use this opportunity to say thank you to

Cheryl Scarlett for the service that she's provided. I think she's moving into a new chapter of her life. I just want to express on our collective behalf best wishes to you and thank you for your many years of service to this institution. [applause]

Ms Scarlett: Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any other questions or comments?

Hearing none, I would welcome a motion, that I'll ask Karen to read into the record, and maybe there'll be a member that would move that motion.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2019-2020 Legislative Assembly budget estimates in the amount of \$67,712,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas. All of those in favour of the motion, please say aye. On the line? Anyone opposed?

The motion is carried unanimously.

We are, I think, at item 6, constituency services order, for which a number of documents are posted under the agenda today. These orders must be amended to reflect the names of the new electoral divisions, the designation of these electoral divisions as urban or rural, as well as the applicable matrix scores which were used in determining the member's services allowance funding for each member. These changes are proposed to take effect on the day that the writ is issued for the next provincial election, and that is one component of the dissolution issue that I mentioned earlier.

Shannon or Darren, do you have anything you'd like to add to that point?

Colin Piquette, I understand you may have a question?

Mr. Piquette: Yes. That's correct, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Piquette: Oh. Okay. Actually, I think this is an opportune time to bring up a concern that I know that many of my rural colleagues have, considering the challenges in representing, you know, the new boundaries. Now, looking at the matrix, of course, you can see that there have been some pretty significant changes.

For those following along, the matrix scores are determined by a calculation of different factors but essentially speaking to how difficult it's deemed to represent a riding and thus what resources are required.

11:00

Now, it goes from 1 to 18; 18 seems about the highest matrix score there's ever been. The higher the matrix score, obviously, the more difficult it's seen. Under present boundaries there about 14 constituencies with a matrix score of 10 or higher, but under the new boundaries that goes up to 17. That will actually even include three constituencies that will have a score of 18, two of 17, and two of 16. So that's a pretty large difference.

You know, I don't have to tell my rural colleagues that we're spread out pretty thin. You spend many hours on the road going from event to event. We have diverse ridings, and you have a difficult time actually representing them unless you're present there. So even the annual mileages under the present boundaries can come up to about 100,000 kilometres a year, and that's in all weather conditions.

I know that particular to the area that I represent, the new riding size is going to end up being, as I think I figured it out, about half the size of Nova Scotia or about the same size as Belgium, with

about 145 elected officials – well, that's just municipal officials – to interact with, not including all the school boards, all the community associations, you know, even all the unincorporated municipalities.

These are some challenges that, you know, I wasn't alone in having concerns about. When the boundary commission was making its deliberations, in fact, I made three separate presentations arguing for effective rural representation. Now, I think that to their credit the boundary commission did make some points about how they were aware of those challenges, and they did make some recommendations on how the LAO funds rural constituencies and how we could actually make it as feasible as we possibly can that the members can represent their ridings effectively.

I think this is something that really needs to be looked at, and I have lots of ideas myself. I don't want to take up too much time on this today – I know the meeting has been going on for some time – but I would really like to recommend that this does get looked at by the Members' Services Committee in the fall. For those that want a reference, you know, you can take a look at the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission on page 61, which I'm assuming every member has a copy of. It gives some suggested actions there.

Now, with all that in mind, I would actually like to make a motion so that could happen. Are hon. members ready for the motion? Is that in order?

The Chair: Colin, could I just get you to wait a moment? We have just passed around the motion. Some of us have not seen this before. If you would give us a minute to just look at it, and then I'm going to recognize Mr. Nixon. I'd just like to take a minute and read it. It's coming to the members on the phone line via e-mail. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have some comments, but I just want to clarify to make sure I understand where we're at. It sounded to me like we were starting to deal with the constituency services order matrix scores that have to be changed in advance of the next election. That was where we started this conversation. I understand what Mr. Piquette is referring to. It seems to me, though, that maybe we should deal with these as two separate items. Am I wrong? We have to get the matrix adjusted, right?

I have some comments on Mr. Piquette's motion, but I think what might be easier is if I could ask one clarifying question on this, then I would be happy to move that item (a), and we can get it done. Then we could work on what Mr. Piquette is doing if that's acceptable to you as chair, Mr. Speaker, and the committee. Just real quick for Ms Scarlett or Ms Dean or whoever is the best person to answer this question. My understanding on this item, the one that is currently on the agenda, is that as a result of the boundary commission changes some ridings drastically changed. This is not a motion that would change the matrix; it is a motion to make the adjustment to the new 87 ridings based on the existing matrix, right? So there's no increase in compensation; i.e., in the matrix score. There may be because the riding has changed, but this stays with the current matrix, correct?

Ms Dean: Mr. Nixon, you are correct. The methodology is the same that's been applied for many years.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, if it's okay, then I would be happy to move that, to deal with what the LAO is asking to deal with on that housekeeping item, and then to have some comments on Mr. Piquette's motion. I think that's cleaner.

The Chair: Thank you. I agree, Mr. Nixon. I think there is a requirement to do this. My understanding from my quick read of Mr. Piquette's points is that it's a future-orientated action request.

Having heard Mr. Nixon's motion – the wording of that motion is somewhere in here, that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 32) as distributed.

Mr. Westhead: Hi there. I'm driving, and I can't check my e-mail. Can someone please read the motion so that I know what we're discussing?

The Chair: Well, I just did, but I'll get Karen to read it again. And watch for deer in front of your car.

Mrs. Sawchuk: The draft motion is to amend the constituency services order to accommodate the schedule that sets out the new list of constituencies and matrix scores. Then the motion is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 32) as distributed.

The Chair: So, Cam, there's been no change in the wording of the motion from what was posted on the site. After this motion – hopefully, it is approved – we will then go to discuss the matter that Colin Piquette just distributed.

Having heard the motion, everyone in favour, please say aye. On the line? Anyone opposed to this motion? Having heard no objection, the motion is carried.

11:10

For those on the phone, Karen is now distributing a specific motion which MLA Piquette is proposing. If you'd give us all a minute while it's distributed and a chance for us to read it. Cam, you better pull over if you're going to read this. It will be sent by e-mail.

We are just waiting to get the proposed motion to the members on the phone by e-mail. Done. The send button has been pushed, but I will ask that Karen read it out for the sake of people in the room as well as those on the telephone.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion by Mr. Piquette is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services review the 2016-17 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission's recommendation (a) under Other Recommendations to Assist in Achieving Effective Representation, at page 61 of its October 2017 final report, and that this review be completed prior to the committee's consideration of any future budget preparation parameters of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The Chair: MLA Piquette, would you like to speak more to the motion?

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I gave the rationale for proposing this in my previous comments, so in the interest of time, yeah, I'm good.

Mr. Nixon: I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker. I think I agree with the intent of this motion. I just want to clarify two things. First, the way I'm reading this is that this is not in any way stating that we support all of recommendations of the report; it's just calling for a review. Then, second, this is nonbinding if there's a dissolution. That's the question that I am asking. I believe that is the intent, so that's why I just want to clarify if we are accomplishing the intent of the mover.

The Chair: Ms Dean.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That would be my interpretation, Mr. Nixon, that when a new committee is struck following the election, they could certainly take this under advisement and move forward with it, but it's up to that committee.

Mr. Nixon: If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to support this motion.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments?

So you've had the motion as proposed by MLA Piquette distributed. Maybe we should read it one more time, and then we'll call for the question.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services review the 2016-17 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission's recommendation (a) under Other Recommendations to Assist in Achieving Effective Representation, at page 61 of its October 2017 final report, and that this review be completed prior to the committee's consideration of any future budget preparation parameters of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The Chair: All in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, say no. On the line?

The motion is carried.

I believe now that we did make a slight adjustment to the – no. Excuse me. Sorry. We are at the transportation order. The draft order amends schedule A to the Members' Services Committee orders, which identifies the electoral divisions as urban or rural, and section 1(b)(i) of the transportation order, which is specific to certain electoral divisions. The suggested motion is that the special standing committee approve the proposed committee and transportation amendment order. Is there someone prepared to speak to the motion? Any questions or answers? Cheryl or Shannon, do you have any comments you'd like to make with respect to this matter? It's a procedural matter to move forward for the next Legislature. Are there any questions?

You have a proposed motion. Karen will read it, and then if one of you would be prepared to move it.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Suggested draft motion is

that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed Consolidated Members' Services Committee and Transportation Amendment Order (No. 1) as distributed.

The Chair: Who is prepared to move that motion? Member Cortes-Vargas. All in favour, please say aye. On the line? Anyone opposed?

Motion is carried.

We now move to – it's identified as 8 – the update on the LAO employee respectful workplace policy. I'll let Cheryl Scarlett lead the discussion off on that.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you again. There was material provided to committee members on this item – it was intended to be for information purposes only – with respect to an update on the employee respectful workplace policy. As you know, the LAO introduced the respectful workplace policy for employees in January 2017. Prior to that, the LAO had paralleled the government of Alberta policy. Since that time, there have been some changes to legislation and directives that required us to update the policy.

Again, what you're seeing in front of you and what was highlighted on the information item summary in red are the changes related to some administrative changes. There have been changes under occupational health and safety and also under the Human

Rights Act. We have updated definitions to now conform with those acts. We have also updated the words that are expressed in the policy to be the most updated LAO mission, vision, and value statements, that are stated in our strategic business plan. There was previously in the government of Alberta policy a 30-day time limit for initiating formal complaints. They've removed that, and we are removing that. As well, then there are just some updates in terms of reference to title changes as a result of the changes in corporate services. You will note that on page 10 there's an addition for clarity purposes in terms of processes for dealing with employees of the Leg. Assembly. There was nothing specific stated in the policy relative to complaints by an employee involving a Clerk, so that now has been added.

The Chair: I think this is fairly straightforward from an administrative perspective.

Mr. Nixon: I'll move . . .

The Chair: We don't really require a motion on this one. It's for information here. We've updated it administratively to – I believe this one is now completely in compliance and maybe ahead of the other pieces of legislation that have been passed.

Given that administrative policy matter that is in place, I would then like to go back to the subcommittee on respectful workplace policies. I believe that's Mr. Dang again. No. Member Cortes-Vargas.

11:20

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just giving some background to the work that the subcommittee has been working on in drafting the member-to-member policy, the committee has actually met in both January and February. In our last meeting in February we actually received a presentation that included a lot of extensive new information, and I think it's important that the committee is going to consider that before presenting a policy to the Members' Services full committee.

I also think that one of the things that we've been talking about is making sure that we're lining up what that policy looks like in comparison to the item that was just presented, the LAO policy. It kind of works collaboratively, so we were also waiting and ensuring that this update came forward. We're going to continue to meet and acknowledge that we want to make sure that we get this policy right.

That's the update, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you. Correct me if I'm wrong. I think the subcommittee has had a request from a couple of members that met with the subcommittee and shared their opinions about the matter and that that discussion is ongoing.

Cortes-Vargas: That's correct. We did have one presentation. I also have been contacted fairly recently as well for a request for other input on the subcommittee, so that's going to be presented to the subcommittee in ongoing meetings. There is definitely more information that's coming forward that the committee needs to consider before presenting a full policy.

The Chair: Any questions?

Ms Luff: I just have a couple of comments if that's all right.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Robyn.

Ms Luff: Yeah. I just, you know, did want to thank the committee. I did have the opportunity to make a presentation to the committee last week, and I want to thank them for taking the time to listen to

me. I have some concerns that there is not an MLA-to-MLA policy in place at this time. I believe the committee was established at the same time as the committee to review the Members' Services orders, and that committee has come back and reported. Many things have been voted on in the same time frame.

I just wanted to express that I have some concerns that there will still be no MLA-to-MLA policy in place going into the next election, and I think it's very important that such a policy is in place. I think if you look at what's going on in the news lately, there are many stories of sort of epidemics of harassment in politics. There is some very good work going on in other jurisdictions and in the U.K. You know, certainly from my point of view, I think that the policy needs to encompass more than just MLAs; I think it needs to encompass MLAs, political staff, and anyone who's working in the Legislature for it to really work. Those are things that I hear that the committee is taking into account, and I appreciate that.

But I think it is important that whatever they come up with, there be some record of the work that they've done. Going forward, it is disappointing if there's nothing in place going into the next election, but I think that there needs to be something on the record with regard to what they're looking at so that this work does continue in the next Legislature if it does not get finished during this Legislature. Those are just the comments that I would like to make.

Should anyone else on the committee who is not on the subcommittee want – there are two documents that I have provided. One is the Equal Voice sort of outline for good harassment policies, and the other is the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme Delivery Report out of the U.K. The committee clerk, Mrs. Sawchuk, has both of those. Should any other members of this committee want to look at them, I believe she could probably provide them to you.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you, Robyn. I know that this is a critical issue that cuts across, actually, certainly, the nation but also the globe. I received some information from yourself which I passed along to the subcommittee as well, and I'm pleased to hear that they have met with you. [An electronic device sounded] Is it something I said? No.

I don't think anybody in this room would disagree that any workplace, including the workplace of politicians, needs to be attentive and to follow through on these kinds of practices. So thank you, Member Cortes-Vargas.

Now, I think Mr. Nixon has withdrawn his request. Yes. Okay.

Mr. Nixon: I have not withdrawn it yet, Mr. Speaker, but I intended to just – I guess we're on the Clerk question, that I added to the agenda.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nixon: I intended to move a couple of motions today. I've been informed of some information since I've moved those that has caused me to probably pull those back for the moment.

But I do want to just quickly, Mr. Speaker, make a couple of comments for the record on this issue. As you know and, I think, the hon. members who are members of the committee and, certainly, my colleagues who are House leaders for the parties have seen, for a while I've been addressing concerns about the hiring of a new Clerk with you. I had some concerns about making sure that we were consulting all parties. I felt that the easiest way to do that was through the House leaders and some mechanism with the independent members of the Assembly. You indicated that you didn't think that that was a direction you wanted to go this time. I

expressed my disappointment, but you are the Speaker, and you made that decision.

But there then were people that applied. Things went quiet for quite a period of time, and then I've been informed that you have hired a headhunter to conduct a search above and beyond the current applicants that applied. I'm fairly concerned, and I'd like it to be in *Hansard*, which is why I'm bringing this up now. The Clerk is important for all parties going forward. Certainly, opposition parties rely on Parliamentary Counsel and the Clerk in particular to do legislative work. I'm sure the government caucus also relies on them significantly. So I think it's very important that they have bipartisan support or at least that other parties' concerns are addressed during that process.

I also think it's important that you acknowledge what the reason was, why we had to skip the current process that you started and then hire another headhunter, and what the cost was to the taxpayer as a result of that. What is the precedent that has been followed to determine to do that and not come to Members' Services for discussion about that, as well as what is the precedent for not wanting to include other parties in the decision on the Clerk?

With that, I have my concerns on the record. You may or may not want to reply to those, but I will certainly withdraw the motions that I intended to move today.

The Chair: Well, for the record I'll simply address the fact that, in fact, as we talked outside, I will be contacting the House leaders of each of the parties. There is a decision, a selection has been made, and I will be sharing that information with you. I made a commitment to all of our staff – many are here – that I would inform them, discuss the appointment with them prior to any public announcement, and you can expect that announcement very, very soon. As I shared with you and with others, I'm extremely conscious of the importance of the position, the person, the selection having the support of all of the House, and that principle is at the very core of the selection for me. I would hope and I believe that the selection of the individual in question will confirm and reaffirm that support by all members of the House. Thank you for raising that. You will be hearing a statement very, very quickly.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Are there any other matters for discussion today?

Thank you again. This may or may not be our last meeting, but I think we need a motion to adjourn. Mr. Carson. All in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed, say no. Motion is carried.

Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 11:30 a.m.]

