



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Tuesday, June 18, 2019
6:25 p.m.

Transcript No. 30-1-1

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First Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Chair
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP), Deputy Chair

Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)

Also in Attendance

Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UCP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean	Clerk
Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Lianne Bell	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Stephanie LeBlanc	Acting Law Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Brian G. Hodgson	Sergeant-at-Arms
Ruth McHugh	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Darren Joy	Senior Financial Officer
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, good evening. I would like to call this meeting to order. First of all, thank you to the members who made a very quick departure from the House to get here as close to on time as possible. That is appreciated.

I'd like to ask all members at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and we don't have anyone on the phone as you all did a great job getting here this evening, so there's no need to go to the phones this evening. I'd also ask that those from staff joining us at the table include themselves. We'll begin with Mr. Ellis, please.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West.

Mr. Williams: Dan Williams, MLA for Peace River.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, MLA, West Yellowhead.

Ms Goodridge: Laila Goodridge, MLA, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Bell: Lianne Bell, chief of staff to the Speaker.

Mr. Deol: Jasvir Deol, MLA, Edmonton-Meadows.

Ms Goehring: Nicole Goehring, MLA, Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Sweet: Heather Sweet, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

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

Ms McHugh: Ruth McHugh, executive director, corporate services, Legislative Assembly Office.

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Clerk of the Assembly.

The Chair: I'm Nathan Cooper, the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

I might just remind members or welcome new members – and perhaps this is your first committee meeting – that all of the microphones are operated by our *Hansard* staff, and as such there is no need for you to turn your microphone on or off. As the chair calls you, your microphone will be activated on your behalf by our *Hansard* team.

Our first item of business today requires a motion of the committee to permit members' participation via teleconference. Section 6 of the Legislative Assembly Act states:

a Member may participate in a meeting of a committee of the Assembly by means of telephone or other communication facilities that permit all Members participating in the meeting to hear each other if all members of the committee consent, and a Member participating in a meeting by those means is deemed for all purposes to be present at that meeting.

The committee has an option before itself, the passing of a motion to approve meeting attendance by teleconference during the Legislature or for the duration of a session, but this motion must be passed unanimously. The motion to approve participation via teleconference for the duration of a Legislature does not prevent the

committee from determining that the personal attendance at a specific meeting is required. In those cases a motion would be moved at the end of a meeting requesting the personal attendance of all members at a subsequent meeting. We have a suggested motion for the committee's consideration, and I would ask the committee clerk to read that motion into the record.

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

for the life of the 30th Legislature the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services permit committee members to participate in committee meetings via teleconference subject to the proviso that the committee may require members' personal attendance at a particular meeting upon passage of a motion to that effect.

The Chair: Would a member be willing to move this motion? I would be willing to open the floor for discussion that any members might have.

Mr. Gotfried: So moved.

The Chair: Member Gotfried, please. Is there any discussion with respect to the motion that's before us? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess just for clarification, then, we give unanimous consent today to this motion for the life of this Assembly, but then if we want members to attend in person at a future meeting, does that require unanimous consent, or does that require a simple majority?

The Chair: That's a fair question. Ms Dean?

Ms Dean: I would say a simple majority.

The Chair: Now, I might just add that there's nothing that would compel a member or require a member to be present; they just may not be able to participate in the meeting if they weren't present, just so that we're clear.

Mr. Dang: Okay.

The Chair: Are there any other additional questions or comments with respect to the motion before us?

All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Are there any opposed? The motion is carried unanimously.

Are there any additions or revisions for today's meeting agenda? If not, I would ask if there's a member that would be willing to move the adoption of the agenda. Ms Goehring. Is there any discussion? All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

I'd like to take a few brief moments this evening to discuss the committee mandate, as this in many respects is an organizational meeting, and lay out the parameters of which we do here.

This committee sets the member's services allowance, constituency office allowances, members' benefits. The Legislative Assembly Act provides the authority for the Members' Services Committee to consider the salaries, allowances, expense allowances, deductions, and reimbursements provided in the act for Members of the Legislative Assembly. The committee also provides the annual estimates of the Legislative Assembly, or the LAO, and may modify regulations, orders, or directives under the Financial Administration Act and the Public Service Act governing the LAO's financials and human resources administration.

A few committee basics for us. Quorum is one-third, or four members, of this committee. Members who are not committee

members or official substitutes may attend committee meetings and participate in discussion but may not move a motion or amendment or vote on a motion before the committee.

Welcome, Member Rowsell.

Discussion flows through the chair, and I along with the committee clerk will keep track of members who indicate they wish to participate. The committee is supported in its work by the LAO: the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Parliamentary Counsel, House services, corporate services, communications, our committee clerk, and other branches of the LAO that we may call upon from time to time depending on the matters of consideration.

The committee generally meets three to four times a year to consider various matters within its mandate, including but not limited to the review of the parameters for the preparation of the annual budget estimates for the Legislative Assembly Office. We lay out what we might expect from the LAO with respect to the budget that they would return and consider the requests of the LAO. We also meet to consider the budget estimates and to consider requests from members related to various orders addressing members' allowances and reimbursements, to review LAO workplace and other policies, and for other matters that may arise from time to time.

Do any members have any questions with respect to the committee process, its supports, or otherwise? Ms Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want a point of clarity for the committee around the setting of dates and times of meetings. Historically there's always been an e-mail sent out with a survey around when we would be meeting. I recognize that maybe this committee meeting was an exception because we wanted to meet sooner than later, but I'm just curious if we will be continuing this practice of you just setting the date or if it will be at the consensus of the committee.

The Chair: I would say that the committee meeting dates will continue be at the call of the chair. However, I would expect that the chair will have significantly more desire at future meeting dates to poll the committee to find out when those dates might work best for all members. Broadly speaking, I would say that it's at the consensus of the committee, but at the end of the day the chair still is able to call meetings at the chair's discretion.

Are there any other questions or comments with respect to the mandate of the committee or what we do here? Excellent.

I would just like to make some comments around temporary substitutions. Notice of a temporary substitution is given

- (a) on a business day, not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting for the substitution of the Chair or Deputy Chair, and

for other members

- (b) prior to the scheduled start of the meeting

for which the substitution is in effect, standing order 56(2.1).

When substitutions occur, it is the responsibility of the original committee member to ensure that the member acting as a substitute has been provided with all of the necessary meeting materials. I would just take a brief moment to highlight that, that if you are unable to attend the meeting, it is important that you do your best

to ensure that those substituting are prepared for the meeting as to have as effective and efficient meetings as possible.

6:35

The review of Members' Services Committee orders. Hon. members, the three orders referenced on our agenda set out remuneration for members, ministers, and other various positions that members hold. There is a provision in orders for member remuneration to be increased or decreased on April 1 of each year by the year-over-year percentage increase or decrease in the Alberta consumer price index published by Statistics Canada for the immediate preceding calendar year.

However, one of the purposes for our meeting today, other than to have some discussion around the committee mandate and to get together while we're here in session, is to highlight the fact that based on a motion approved by the committee on February 9, 2016, this annual adjustment is frozen until two months after the first day of the 30th Legislature. In effect, this means that unless there is a decision of the committee to continue the freeze, member remuneration will be subject to an annual adjustment on April 1 of next year.

Does anyone have any questions or comments with respect to this decision that is before the committee that we need to make prior to April 1 of next year?

Mr. Ellis: Just to be clear, Mr. Chair/Mr. Speaker, this is something that would not take effect until April 2020. Is that correct? Can you just clarify again just for my sake, I guess, obviously, what is the decision? Are we making a decision now on something, or is this something that has already been made?

The Chair: Sure. There is no action item required of the committee. If the committee makes no decision, then the freeze would be lifted two months after the first day of the 30th Legislature, which, of course, was the day of the throne speech, so two months following that. Of course, the committee could make a decision after that two-month period or at any point in time to continue the freeze, to not make a decision, and the freeze would be lifted, and then member remuneration would be subject to an annual increase based upon the consumer price index, as previously stated.

My purpose here was just to highlight the fact that this motion had been passed previously, and I thought it was reasonable for members to be aware that the freeze would be lifted if there was no information provided.

Seeing no other discussion, is there any other business? Excellent.

The date of the next meeting then will be at the call of the chair; however, the chair does intend to try to poll members as to when it may be best suited for members to meet.

Would a member like to move to adjourn?

Mr. Dang: I would so move.

The Chair: Member Dang. All those in favour? Any opposed? We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:38 p.m.]

