



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

Special Standing Committee  
on  
Members' Services

Monday, January 20, 2020  
1 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
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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

Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)  
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)  
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UCP)\*  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)

\* substitution for Nathan Neudorf

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**1 p.m.**

**Monday, January 20, 2020**

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good afternoon. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

I'd ask all members joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and following that, I will call upon members that are joining us via teleconference. If we can start with Mr. Ellis, we'll go all the way around, and if those joining us at the table would also introduce themselves for the record, that would be helpful.

**Mr. Ellis:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Garth Rowswell, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

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

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

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

**Mr. Dang:** Good afternoon. Thomas Dang, Edmonton-South.

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

**Ms Goehring:** Good afternoon. Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I just want to say a special thank you for all the artists that are joining us for today's meeting.

**Ms Cherkewich:** Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk.

**Mr. Joy:** Darren Joy, senior financial officer.

**Ms McHugh:** Ruth McHugh, executive director, corporate services with the LAO.

**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. I'd like to welcome everyone joining us.

Last but certainly not least.

**Ms Rempel:** Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Those of you who are joining us on the phone.

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Gotfried is attempting to call in. He's out of the country at the moment, and they're in the process of trying to get him on record. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you. Should he arrive, we will acknowledge him at that point.

Also, I would like to note for the record the following substitution: Mr. Rowswell for Mr. Neudorf.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items for us all. The meeting and agenda as well as other documents were posted last week, last Monday to be precise, to the committee's internal website for members' information. The microphone consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff. Please keep your mobile devices on silent during the meeting. Audio and video recordings of the committee proceedings are streamed live on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV and recorded by

*Alberta Hansard*. Audio and video access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

Good afternoon, Mr. Gotfried. For the record could you introduce yourself, please?

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

**The Chair:** Excellent. I see that another member has joined us at the table. If you can introduce yourself for the record, that would be appreciated.

**Mr. Deol:** Jasvir Deol for Edmonton-Meadows. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Approval of the agenda. Are there any additions, revisions for today's meeting? If not, would a member like to approve the adoption of the agenda? Ms Goodridge. Is there any discussion? All in favour of approval of the agenda, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Approval of the minutes from November 27, 2019. Are there any amendments to the minutes from our last committee meeting, on the 27th of November? If there are none, I'm happy to entertain a motion to approve as presented. Ms Goodridge. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, in favour? Opposed? That motion is carried and so ordered.

Members, before I open the floor to the discussion on the proposed Legislative Assembly Office '20-21 budget, I'd like to provide the committee with a brief overview of that budget and some additional comments. As noted in the budget parameters document included in your package, at our November 27, 2019, meeting of the Members' Services Committee we provided direction to the LAO to plan for a reduction of 5 per cent to the overall total of the LAO branch budgets, including the budget for the office of the Speaker. The LAO has assessed the core services to determine where operational and programming changes could be made to accommodate the 5 per cent reduction without significantly impacting the services for members. The LAO succeeded in this task, resulting in a bottom-line reduction of \$1.256 million, or 5.01 per cent of the current year's budget.

By way of background, the LAO budget is comprised of approximately \$65.3 million, and that is made up of three main components. The LAO branch budgets: approximately \$23.8 million. The LAO branch budgets include the office of the Speaker, corporate services, parliamentary services, visitor services, library services, human resource services, and committees. MLA administration: approximately \$33.4 million. Caucus budgets are the balance at approximately \$8 million.

If you recall from the discussion at our November 27 meeting, there are two areas where I recommended changes. They were the Alberta Branded store and the elimination of one constituency seminar. As a reminder for members, the Alberta Branded store opened in 2015 in its current space. Its predecessor was keeping in the form of the traditional gift shop, which was hosted in the pedway. Although the financial goal of the current store was to always achieve a profit or at a minimum operate at a cost-recovery basis, unfortunately this has not been achieved. The financial results for the store have not improved over the last four years, and on average the store is costing the LAO approximately \$240,000 to \$300,000 a year to operate. This is not sustainable.

With respect to the decision to close Alberta Branded, the LAO reviewed the core mandate of our organization, which is primarily focused on parliamentary programming and education. The Alberta Branded store in its art gallery format is not in keeping with the core

mandate of the LAO. Consultations were not required during the process as it is clear that the art gallery supported by the LAO was outside of the scope of the LAO's mandate and not an appropriate use of LAO resources. While we acknowledge that this decision is disappointing to many, including artists who have joined us here today, we hope that they will find success in finding other venues in the city and the province, that both support Alberta artists.

The budget incorporates savings from the closing of the Alberta Branded store at the end of the current fiscal year. As described in your budget package, the LAO will develop a smaller retail presence and an e-commerce site within the visitor services budget to ensure that there is some form of retail services available to members and eventually to the public. The plan is to make available to members items that are suitable to present, to give to the public, to purchase as souvenirs focused on Alberta-branded and parliamentary programming merchandise.

The LAO has followed the recommendation to eliminate one of the two biannual constituency employee seminars. This is reflected in the budget as a saving of \$60,000.

You'll also note that the budget presentation format has changed to reflect our current organizational structure. As expected in a service organization, the majority of the costs relate to people and their salaries. Some of the specialized units in our organization that had been broken out and reported separately in the past are very small, and presenting their small budgets individually would inappropriately disclose salaries that are not on the Alberta salary disclosure list. On the recommendation of our corporate services executive director we have developed a reporting system more in line with other legislative officers and more consistent with a transparent overview, as recommended by the Auditor General.

I would like to turn it over to Ruth for a more detailed explanation on the changes in our budgeting process.

**Ms McHugh:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We actually have changes in three of our reporting mechanisms: our budget, our annual report, and our strategic business plan. If okay with you, I'll just give a brief overview of all of the changes. Thank you.

Starting with the budget, the LAO has moved to a more consolidated budget format for two main reasons: one, to avoid inappropriate salary disclosure, as our Speaker has already helped you understand; and two, to reflect the current organizational structure and to focus on the services and supports that the LAO provides. As Mr. Speaker pointed out, in a service organization like ours the majority of costs relate to people and their salaries. Like all public bodies, the Legislative Assembly Office is subject to the disclosure requirements of the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, which mandates disclosure above a certain level. Some of the specialized units that had been broken out and reported separately in the past are very small, and presenting those small budgets individually would inappropriately disclose certain salaries of individuals, as our Speaker has pointed out.

**1:10**

The second advantage of a more consolidated format is to make the information more useful to the reader. That is always the objective of good financial reporting. As the LAO provides a number of different services or programs, it seems most useful to report our budget by program so you can easily see the costs of delivering each type of service. For example, we believe it's helpful for you to know how much it costs for the parliamentary services you receive or how much we're spending on visitor services or corporate services, committees, et cetera. The impact on the budget of new or changing services is now described in the narrative that we're providing in the budget. This new format provides you with

a more detailed narrative for each line of the program budget, and it explains our approach to finding the 5 per cent reduction that you directed. Again, we believe this to be the most helpful format for you.

The other change that we made was to our annual report. The LAO has moved to results-based annual reporting, as recommended in a number of reports by the office of the Auditor General. We've structured our 2018-19 annual report, which was tabled on December 3 and is available on our website, around the Auditor General's recommendations. His recommendations are that the goals and priorities of an organization should be clearly identified in the annual report and that the focus should be identifying, assessing, and reporting lessons learned, which creates opportunities to improve operations and future plans. Our annual report follows this format, and it contains the 2018-19 performance measures targets and an analysis of the actual results. As always, the annual report also contains the audited financial statements.

The next change was to our strategic business plan. Our future-focused 2020-23 LAO strategic business plan, that you've received, outlines five goals and the actions that we're going to take over the next three years to achieve those goals. It also contains the performance measures that we'll use to track our progress. Some of our goals are similar to the goals in our existing plan, which makes sense as our core business and services haven't changed. But in cases where the '20-23 goals were similar to the previous goals, the performance measures remain relevant, and they were incorporated.

Some of our goals are new. Finding ways to reduce costs while continuing to deliver the high level of service expected of us will require us to actually think and operate in new ways. Our new goals and new actions and the resulting new performance measures will help us to innovate and find better ways to do what we do. We'll look forward to reporting the results in our annual reports.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ruth.

I'd also like to ask Ms Dean, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, to provide a bit of an overview on how the LAO found or realized the additional savings inside the budget.

**Ms Dean:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, committee members. I want to touch upon the pages in the package that you would have received through the website. First, the estimates summary page is followed by another estimates summary page with explanatory notes, so my objective here is just to run through the explanatory notes, branch by branch.

First, beginning with corporate services, which encompasses financial management, IT, broadcast, and communications, there's a 1 per cent reduction in this budget, which amounts to about \$88,000. As the Speaker noted, that's realized through the elimination of one constituency employee seminar as well as deferral of some equipment maintenance. Now, we feel we can provide cost-effective staff training through online tools so that staff training is not compromised. We also feel, on the equipment maintenance piece, that we can defer that for the coming year without risking performance. We do, however, feel that this is a one-time reduction so as to ensure appropriate maintenance is in place to protect our equipment and information assets in the long term.

Now, the next area is parliamentary services, which you know provides critical services to support the Assembly and committees. This is comprised of security and ceremonial services, House services, *Hansard*, Parliamentary Counsel, the Clerk's office, and interparliamentary relations. This is a hold-the-line budget as we don't feel we can make any reductions in this area due to the demands of the sessional calendar and the committees' meeting schedule. As you will recall, there were unprecedented sitting hours

this past year, so we must ensure that adequate funding is available. We are doing what we can to find efficiencies, and I would note that I've reduced the staffing complement in my office by one FTE through attrition.

Now, the next area is Legislature Library services. We have found significant savings of 7 per cent, or approximately \$200,000, here. This is being realized through some staffing changes through attrition, one full-time and one part-time position. We are also increasing digital availability of library resources, which provides cost savings in the area of government documents and preservation.

The next branch is human resource services. We looked at this budget closely, but don't feel we can make any reductions there because we want to ensure adequate staffing levels are in place to ensure that human resource pay and benefit requirements for members and caucus and constituency offices are met.

Now, as the Speaker alluded to, the branch that is undergoing the most significant reduction is visitor services and Alberta Branded with the winding down of the Alberta Branded store. There will also be modification to the visitor services programming and adjusted hours of operation. We feel it's more fiscally responsible to adjust our hours according to the season. You'll note that we have already begun to do that. We now have implemented winter hours, and our summer hours will run from May through September. This translates to a savings of just over \$500,000, 20 per cent.

We did find some savings in the legislative committees budget largely due to the reduction in advertising costs. What we've found over the last number of years is that the committees are increasingly moving towards no-cost or low-cost advertising when they're seeking public input. That translates to a savings of about \$180,000.

The planning and redevelopment budget will remain unchanged as there are important ongoing initiatives in this area. Notably, we are pursuing an updated HR payroll system to deliver services through a secure portal. We are also making some improvements to the Sliq software, which are the tools that provide for the electronic record of the Assembly and committee proceedings. We are moving towards a cloud-based environment. We are at the very early stages with respect to that initiative, and we are working together with the officers of the Legislature and the government to share information and plan with the objective of establishing a security framework prior to implementation.

You will also note that we no longer have an election preparedness budget because we are no longer in that part of the Legislature cycle. This translates to a savings of \$250,000. I would note that in the coming years, as we reach the latter part of the 30th Legislature, we would look to reinstate this funding.

Finally, the MLA admin budget will see a reduction as a result of the 5 per cent rollback in member remuneration. I believe the Speaker noted that this is a savings of \$334,000.

Caucus budgets. There is no change here because these are determined by a formula that has been previously approved by the committee.

In closing, I would add that we continue to survey members and staff to ensure we are meeting your requirements. We recently conducted a satisfaction survey this fall, and we are pleased with the results, with the majority of members and staff being pleased with the level of service provided. We have 80 per cent satisfaction levels in the areas of IT services and training as well as our procedural orientation tools, 75 per cent satisfaction approval rating with respect to security services, and 70 per cent satisfaction with HR. Again, we have some areas where we can make some improvement, but we will strive towards those goals in the coming months.

Again, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you, your staff, the LAO management team, and the rest of the employees at the

LAO for their work in the preparation of this budget and their ongoing commitment to the highest standards of professionalism and service for members, caucus, and constituency staff.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you very much, Ms Dean.

I, too, would like to echo your thank yous and provide them on behalf of the committee and all members of the Assembly. A thank you to yourself for the great work that you have done in leading the Legislative Assembly Office since your appointment. Beyond that, thank you to the rest of the staff who, I know, put in a lot of long and difficult hours to deliver on the parameters set out by the committee on November 27.

Ms Dean, you noted in your remarks with respect to the legislative security staff. I happen to see at the back of the room the newly appointed, full-time Sergeant-at-Arms. Congratulations. On Friday I understand that the Clerk made her final decision with respect to our team here, and I look forward to working with Chris in the ongoing security of our building. Congratulations. It's great to have you as the new, full-time guy.

**1:20**

In summary, the total voted LAO expenditure request is \$65,348,000. This is a reduction of \$1,590,000 over the prior year's voted expenditure. The \$1.590 million reduction is made up of LAO operational and programming savings of \$1.256 million and a reduction of \$334,000 in MLA remuneration based on the August 19 decision to reduce member indemnity by 5 per cent.

Before we open the discussion on this issue, the purpose of this meeting is for us to approve the budget or approve the estimates as presented by the Legislative Assembly Office, so I will call upon a member to move that – thank you, Mr. Ellis – the budget be presented. I believe the wording would be: moved by Mr. Ellis that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the '20-21 Legislative Assembly budget estimates in the amount of \$65,348,000.

Is there discussion? Ms Sweet.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if we could speak to line item legislative committees under summary of budget estimates by program. I see the estimate for 2018-19 was \$991,000. The actuals were only \$225,283. We then see in 2019-2020 the estimate again was \$907,000, but the forecast is only \$399,000. I'm just wondering why there's such a large overestimate, I guess, in the actual precedent that's been set around the actuals that have been spent. There's quite a difference between the estimate and then the actuals.

**Ms Dean:** I'm happy to respond to that. In the last five years there has been a change in how committees have conducted their business. I would say that in the 28th Legislature there were significant travel expenses. Committees were going around the province. That has tapered off in the last number of years, hence the difference in the forecast. The other key issue, which I've already raised, is the difference with respect to the need to spend a lot of money on advertising. The policy committees traditionally had budgets in the area of \$150,000 each for that purpose, so that's obviously not required in this day and age.

**Ms Sweet:** One follow-up.

**The Chair:** Please.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you for the information.

I guess my question would be: with the change in practice should these estimates then not be adjusted? Or is there a requirement within the Members' Services Committee that we need to be

changing the policy? Why is it that with the change in practice this is not being reflected?

**The Chair:** I will open, and then Shannon can provide additional comments should she choose to do so. I think one of the things that is uncertain now that we have seen a change in government is that the sitting days and sitting hours certainly have increased year over year, and it is not a hundred per cent certain what committees will look like as we move forward into this year. While we were comfortable making a significant reduction to the line item to realize some savings, I think making a greater one may put at some risk our ability as committees to be able to do the things that we would still like to accomplish in the important work that committees do. I think there are a couple of factors that the uncertainty of – perhaps we will have increased committee days, in which case we'll need to have the budget.

**Ms Dean:** A related piece to that is that sometimes there are new committees that are established through the course of a fiscal year, and we don't know what those are. Now, we do know that there are going to be two new committees that will be required for statute reviews. Those range from \$60,000 to \$100,000, depending on the committee. Again, there could be the need for other types of committees, so we have to have some envelope available to account for that. Again, it's unclear as to what the expectations are with respect to members and committees and how they do their business, so it's an envelope that's available should the need arise.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone else? Ms Goehring, followed by Mr. Dang.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak about the visitor services and Alberta Branded budget, specifically with the closing of Alberta Branded. I listened. In your opening remarks you recapped the meeting that occurred on the 27th of November where we were informed that the plan would be to close the store and that employees were informed the previous day of the store closing with, my understanding was, a four-month working notice. In that meeting we asked, myself specifically, whether artists had been consulted in this decision, and the answer was no. I know that my office and many members have been inundated with e-mails, phone calls, and expressed concern over the lack of consultation regarding this decision as well as the decision itself.

I know that when we were discussing the budget, you had mentioned that you felt it does not fall under the scope of the mandate, and I'm concerned to hear that. We value the contribution that the arts community makes in the province and strongly believe that Albertans visiting their building, the Legislature, should have access to the art that's provided locally, that they put so much effort in to share their story. That's concerning to me. Also, in your opening remarks, Mr. Speaker, you identified that in the closure you hope the best for artists, which leads me to strongly believe that there isn't a transition plan in place for the artists, which is concerning.

I have some questions related to this because since communicating with the artists, I've heard over and over that many artists feel that they had been making positive sales at the Alberta Branded store and disagreed with some of the numbers that were being presented. So I'm wondering if the committee could be provided with sales reports for the last year. We haven't been given a lot of information on this specific area, which kind of leads us to believe that we're running on blind faith in terms of how this decision has

been made. If some numbers could be provided, that would be much appreciated.

**The Chair:** Sure. Year-over-year sales for Alberta Branded: beginning in 2016-17, \$389,288; 2017-18, \$352,466; 2018-19, \$300,941; and this year, 2019-20, \$300,070. Each year the projected sales were supposed to be north of \$450,000. Unfortunately, none of those were ever realized.

Cost of operation: 2016-2017, \$628,000; 2017-18, \$656,000; 2018-19, \$610,000; and the cost this year is \$512,000 thus far.

The net loss in 2016-17, \$240,000; 2017-18, \$303,000; 2018-19, \$302,000; and for 2019-20 the current operating loss is \$142,000.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.  
A follow-up if I can?

**The Chair:** Please.

**Ms Goehring:** I know that some of the artists had been informed by your office that the decision wasn't final and that it would be under discussion today, which we're in the process of doing right now. I'm curious if we're going to have an honest conversation about perhaps delaying the closure of the store and if there are alternatives in ways that artists could be consulted with to talk about how the store could be successful, how it could be improved, other ways that we can enhance and promote Alberta art in the province. I know you had mentioned a kiosk. I've heard from the art community that there are concerns about that. I would really hope that we're able to have a conversation to discuss a delay in the immediate closure of the store to allow artists the opportunity to share their voice and come up with some possible solutions on how we can continue to highlight the important work that artists contribute to our province.

After hearing your response, I have a question about a possible motion.

Thank you.

**1:30**

**The Chair:** Sure. With respect to consultations that may or may not have taken place, this is a business decision that ultimately the LAO has and will, pending the approval of the budget, undertake. Senior management certainly had some robust discussion around the ongoing sustainability of Alberta Branded and the gift shop in its current format. It would be very unique for senior management to consult with employees of the store about potentially closing the store. I can't think of a context in which that would happen.

One thing that you said that I take some pause with – I personally believe that the arts community is very important, and I am supportive of the arts community. The challenge for the committee and for the Assembly is to ask the question: what is the core mandate of our organization? If you can't answer the question that subsidizing a gift shop profiling Alberta artists is part of that core mandate, then we need to really take pause about what that looks like. Although the dollars and cents are one of the primary drivers, it's also outside of the mandate of our organization to continue to do this. So I don't think that, or I am certainly of the opinion, continuing to subsidize a project outside of focusing on parliamentary democracy and education is a good decision by the committee, but of course we are a committee that can make a decision based upon the needs of our organization and with respect to what the closure of Alberta Branded might look like. The vehicle for that is likely in the form of not approving the budget and improving the estimates and having other discussion.

I think I'll leave it at that for now.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know, certainly, that we are against the immediate closure of the Alberta Branded store, and if I could ask the Clerk about the appropriateness of a motion perhaps to speak to that.

**The Chair:** You're welcome to ask the Clerk. I might answer on behalf of the Clerk. But, yeah, go ahead.

**Ms Goehring:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you. We would like to ask that the closure of Alberta Branded be delayed and an alternative business plan be completed to address the concerns that the artists and the members on this side of the House have identified.

**The Chair:** Okay. I appreciate your desire to potentially move that motion. As you know, under Standing Order 52 a memo was circulated on Monday with the budget documents and all of the other documents, that any substantive motion would need to be presented to the committee prior to the close of business on Thursday. It is challenging because a motion of that nature, to delay the immediate closure of Alberta Branded, certainly was not placed before the committee. So, as such, it would be out of order for us to move a substantive motion. If you wanted to move that motion, it would've been possible should you have worked with Parliamentary Counsel last week to ensure that that happened.

Ms Sweet.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your comments. I just want to go back to the notice of motion. Because this is a new process, I think this is a great time to have a conversation around these amendments as this is the first time we're having to do it 48 hours ahead of time. My understanding is that the way it was worded was that a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee unless the substantive motion relates directly to the business then under consideration. So would that not, then, mean that we would have the ability to still introduce amendments on the floor? I mean, parliamentary practice federally is that members are still able to – like, there is precedence that members are still able to present motions to the floor.

**Ms Dean:** This is a new process, so I think we're working through that. This would amount to an amendment to the main motion about approving the budget motion. It's within the realm of the chair to decide whether it could be moved.

**The Chair:** I guess in some respect the committee is its own master, if you will, so there may be parameters in which that could be heard. I'm reluctant to allow a motion to be heard that wasn't provided with notice mostly because we had also included in the memo discussion about working closely with Parliamentary Counsel to ensure that all of our motions are in order and otherwise.

I think that there is still a vehicle before us for you to accomplish this goal, and if members of the committee are inclined to see that happen – but I don't know if there's anyone else that wants to provide comment on this particular issue. Mr. Ellis.

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, again, I'm just a very simple man, but I'm just trying to understand. We're here to approve the estimates. Is that correct? It looks like considerable work has been done by staff in, of course, your department. And I think you provided a very reasonable explanation in regard to the mandate of the Speaker's office. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but is it on average that the Alberta Branded store is losing, like, \$300,000-plus?

**Ms McHugh:** Two hundred and fifty thousand to \$300,000 each year.

**Mr. Ellis:** Yeah. Right. It's a considerable amount of money, and, you know, Alberta has been faced with an extreme fiscal crisis for a number of years; let me just say that. I think it's been asked of the people of Alberta and the government of Alberta to, you know, look within to become fiscally responsible in an attempt to get Alberta back on track. What's being asked or what your department is asking, Mr. Speaker, I don't think is unreasonable. I know in my own personal household – I think in many Albertans' personal households – we always have to look internally and say, "How can we save a few dollars?" especially when times are tough.

I mean, I certainly appreciate the comments being made by the Official Opposition. However, I believe I do have a motion, that is also on the floor, that still has to be voted on. I'll leave my comments at that.

Thank you.

1:40

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ellis.

I'm just going to check with the Clerk here. Like, given that this is the first time that we've used the process, I may be willing to make a change. The challenge is that it will have to be an amendment to Mr. Ellis's motion, will it not?

Can you read me the motion that you've prepared?

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To ask to delay the immediate closure of Alberta Branded and to request an alternative business plan to address the concerns identified by members and the arts community.

**The Chair:** Okay. If we move the motion, and we are not there yet – I saw that Ms Goodridge wants to be on the list, so let's go ahead and hear from Ms Goodridge prior to additional comments.

**Ms Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to address some of the comments that were raised by Ms Goehring, I'm curious to know whether any motions were placed from the Official Opposition that did follow the process, following the process that was put forward last week to the committee.

**The Chair:** Certainly, the Official Opposition did provide, which was then provided to all members of the committee, any additional motions that they had planned on moving last week, so this would be separate to that.

I think what I might do is actually put it to the will of the committee to determine whether or not the committee will hear the motion, knowing that it is outside of the process agreed to but keeping in mind that it is the first time that we've used Standing Order 52, so there is some nuance there. If that is the will of the committee, then we will – oh. I will hear from the Law Clerk, please.

**Ms Cherkewich:** Thank you, Mr. Chair – or Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** That's fine. Either way. Nathan.

**Ms Cherkewich:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, I think what you've proposed may actually fit within the framework of the new provision. Under subsection (3) of Standing Order 52.041(1) it states that "a Member may not, without the approval of the committee, move a substantive motion or an amendment that was not filed in accordance with suborder (1)."

**The Chair:** I feel like perhaps I should have asked you 10 minutes ago.

**Ms Cherkewich:** I only just looked at the provisions.

**The Chair:** Okay. It would appear that the Standing Order allows a vote of the committee to hear the motion, and I'm happy to do that now unless there's further discussion. For the clarity of members, we are voting on

whether or not to hear the amendment as recommended by Ms Goehring.

All those in favour of hearing the amendment as proposed by Ms Goehring, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone?

That motion is defeated.

We are back on the main motion as proposed by Mr. Ellis. Mr. Dang.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some additional comments. I think you and I are perhaps the longest continuously serving members of this committee, looking around the room, which is strange. I guess I just have some questions about – as you know and I know and as all members know, the format, as you touched on earlier, of these budget estimates has been changed a number of times since the 29th Legislature till now as well. I have a question around those revenue lines. In this new budget and the numbers you presented for Ms Goehring earlier around the revenues of Alberta Branded, you cited things like approximately \$300,000 in losses and whatnot. Looking at the 2019-2020 estimates, which are from last year, of course, and recognizing that it was not broken out in the same way, could you explain to me why total revenue from visitor services is in the neighbourhood of \$600,000, basically? Where is that other \$300,000 coming from?

**The Chair:** That's the expense line, I believe, that you're looking at. The revenue line is immediately below that, where it's \$405,000, \$306,000. Those are the projections. The estimate is \$405,000. The actual was \$306,000.

**Mr. Dang:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. In last year's estimates, though, those numbers actually contradict the totals in terms of – like, visitor services as a whole generated \$600,000. So where is the \$300,000 that was generated not from Alberta Branded, I guess? Does that make sense?

**The Chair:** I'm not sure what line item you're referring to.

**Mr. Dang:** It's not from this year's estimate; it's from last year's estimate. I'm wondering why they don't reconcile the same, I guess. I recognize that they were broken out differently, so I guess it can be tricky.

**The Chair:** Mr. Joy, are you . . .

**Mr. Joy:** Well, we had to change the format, Member Dang, so that we could have a net effect of the revenue and the expenses as they were associated with Alberta Branded, so we just basically moved the revenue up. The revenue that's remaining there would be the collective amount that would have been in the estimates from the previous year.

**Mr. Dang:** So what other revenue sources does visitor services have?

**Mr. Joy:** There's a little bit of *Hansard* because there's the sale of scrolls and whatnot. That's the other small portion of it.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ruth, did you have any additional comment?

**Ms McHugh:** Just a really small one. Thank you for clarifying the question around: what are the other sources of revenue?

**The Chair:** Did you have any additional questions, Member Dang?

**Mr. Dang:** I'm good. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there any other questions on the motion as proposed by Mr. Ellis? Is that a question, Ms Sweet?

**Ms Sweet:** Yeah. Sorry.

**The Chair:** Ms Sweet.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you. Again, I think I'm just looking for more clarity in understanding why – I appreciate the confidentiality around salaries and the amalgamation of the branches, around making sure that there's confidentiality around those who are not required to be disclosed due to salary components. I guess my question is: how do we determine – when we look at other independent officers' budgets, there's much more detail, similar to what was done in the past, in last year's budget, around operational expenses. If we look at how it worked in 2019 or last year, we had travel expenses broken out. Postage and office equipment were broken out. Like, all of the requirements – conference calls, advertising, et cetera – were broken out.

If we're looking at confidentiality around salaries, I get that piece. There are mechanisms in place around sunshine lists and things like that, what we can see. I guess the question that I have is: why is there no accountability, then, around looking at the travel and all of those other expenses that offices are required to have? I think of some of the questions that are coming out now as we look at it and as we hear from the government that there's been direction around trying to limit travel, trying to limit mileages, trying to find cost expenditures in other areas, across ministries and other independent officers. I guess my question would be: if that expectation is everywhere else in every other independent office and ministry, why is it not being reported the same way for the LAO?

**The Chair:** Ruth.

**Ms McHugh:** Yeah. I can help with that. Again, we thought that this would be the most helpful way to share the information with you so that you can see by program how much each program or service that you are receiving is costing you, and then we added more detail, so a whole page per line item to help you understand that. With the independent offices of the Legislature, many of them have only one program or maybe two programs, right? For example, the office of the Auditor General has two programs, if you will, performance auditing and financial statement auditing. Then it only makes sense to report those other things like salary, travel, et cetera, because, really, there's only one program or two. You'd have a one-line estimate.

**1:50**

We've provided a 14-line estimate and details around each one. We thought that that would be the most helpful way for you to look at the information, based on the services that you're being provided. But I can assure you that we have taken such a careful look. When we were looking to find 5 per cent savings without impacting services to members, we went through absolutely every single



detail. I can assure you that with our travel, our hosting, there were no stones left unturned, truly.

**The Chair:** I think that that is a reflection of the fact that we can see the reduction of \$88,000 in corporate services, \$200,000 in library services, \$29,000 in the office of the Speaker. Like, all of the line items are going down in all of the places, so I think that it is fair to proceed with the format. Also, Ruth has recently come from the Auditor General's office, and this reflects what the Auditor General also would like.

**Ms Sweet:** Just a follow-up, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and I'm not trying to insinuate any questions around – we've just gone through this budget process with the independent officers and with the government. I mean, I'm just asking questions to try to see where the alignment is.

But the other piece of this, the reason I'm asking about the breakdown, is that we also are concerned as the Official Opposition that it doesn't just become about staffing in the sense of people through attrition or people losing their jobs or things like that and not being able to find cost savings in other areas. When we talk about line items, part of that is to ensure that this isn't at the expense of Albertans' jobs, that this is actually about ways of trying to find efficiencies in other areas. If anything, it actually gives the LAO that ability to demonstrate that this isn't about just attrition and potential terminations of positions.

**The Chair:** I think the other thing that's important to note is that in the way that this is reflected both in branch budgets as well as the office of the Speaker's budget, this is exactly what's required of caucus budgets as well. I think that this is in line, I suppose, with the way that the caucuses also report their budgets. All of the expenses, of course, are at the approval of the senior financial officer, and all of the expenses are also auditable by the AG to ensure compliance. I don't think that any of that changes given the reporting structure. Well, certainly, none of that changes given the reporting structure.

**Ms McHugh:** If I may, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** Ruth.

**Ms McHugh:** Just, you know, to give you a little bit more assurance, with each line item where we're showing the reductions, we gave you a page of narrative explaining exactly where we found that reduction, to give you that assurance that in some cases it was one position or 1.5 due to attrition, et cetera. We were really explicit in the narrative, which we thought would be actually more helpful to you than to just see numbers, where you don't know: why is that salary line reducing? It wouldn't give you enough information. Where salaries or positions were impacted, we explained that very clearly to you in the narrative, and in the narrative we reconciled that back to each line item in the budget. So you could clearly see where that \$88,000 was coming from. We thought that that would be the most helpful way for you to get a good understanding of how the business runs in order to provide the services it does.

**Ms Sweet:** Perfect. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I'm willing to call the question. All those in favour of the motion moved by Mr. Ellis that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2020-21 Legislative Assembly budget estimates in the amount of \$65,348,000, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones? Opposed?

That motion is carried and so ordered.

**Mr. Ellis:** Can we get a recorded vote on this?

**The Chair:** Sure.

A division has been called for the purposes of the committee today. Please state your name and how you are voting, and it will begin with Mr. Ellis.

**Mr. Ellis:** Mike Ellis, Calgary-West. Aye.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Garth Rowswell, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright. Aye.

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

**Mr. Long:** Martin Long, West Yellowhead. Aye.

**Mr. Deol:** Jasvir Deol, Edmonton-Meadows. Aye.

**Mr. Dang:** Thomas Dang, Edmonton-South. Aye.

**Ms Sweet:** Heather Sweet. Aye.

**Ms Goehring:** Nicole Goehring. Aye.

**The Chair:** On the phone?

**Mr. Williams:** Dan Williams. Aye.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Richard Gotfried, MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek. Aye.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Proceeding to other items of business, for members' information a number of recommendations were provided by the subcommittee to review Members' Services Committee orders, which undertook a substantive review of MSC orders and a number of additional matters referred to it by the committee from 2017 to 2019. The committee adopted the three subcommittee reports submitted, with one revision. This item of business addresses two matters arising from those reports. Members should have a copy of the briefing document which explains the proposed amendment. In brief, this is a housekeeping amendment to the exemptions that apply to caucus and constituency contracts regarding the independence of the legislative branch from the executive branch. Are there any questions on this item of business, or would the Law Clerk like to make any comments?

I don't see any questions. I guess I'll get somebody to move a motion. Is there anyone willing to move the motion? The motion will read something similar to: that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the Regulations Exemption and Variance Amendment Order (No. 2), being Order No. MSC 01/20, as distributed.

Mr. Ellis to move it. We are moments away from having it on the screens for you to review, perhaps.

All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone? Opposed?

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Item 5(b), the draft policy for reimbursement, travel, meals, hospitality, and other expenses. The draft LAO policy document along with a comparative government of Alberta expense policy document were posted for members' information.

I will ask Ruth if she wouldn't mind providing an overview prior to opening the floor for discussion.

**Ms McHugh:** Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the 29th Legislature the Members' Services Committee struck a

subcommittee to review the Members' Services Committee orders except those dealing with members' compensation and benefits. As part of its review one of the subcommittee's recommendations was to maintain and update the exemption in the order, clarifying that the directive governing travel, meal, and hospitality expenses that is in place for the government of Alberta does not apply to the Legislative Assembly Office.

The subcommittee recommended that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct LAO Administration to prepare a draft policy for the Committee's consideration concerning the reimbursement of travel, meal, hospitality and other expenses incurred by LAO officers and employees in carrying out Assembly business.

LAO administration has now prepared the draft policy in front of you for your consideration. It is aligned with the government of Alberta travel, meal, and hospitality expense policy. Where appropriate, wording has been substituted to reflect the LAO perspective, and some sections have been specifically omitted; for example, if they relate to the Premier's and ministerial offices.

That is my overview. Thank you.

2:00

**The Chair:** Excellent. I'm happy to open this topic up for some discussion if anyone has some questions, comments, concerns. Member Dang, please.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to see that, but I know that there was quite a bit of work put into this over many years here. I want to thank everyone for the work that they've done on this. I guess I just have some questions and some clarification I'd like to see around this because, especially given what we've seen in other jurisdictions, like in perhaps British Columbia or other places in the last few years, these types of directives and these types of rules are really important to make sure that we do have a strong, functioning, and transparent Legislative Assembly Office.

I'm curious, I guess, why there are some particular exemptions in place that then aren't further clarified. In particular, I have some concerns around, on the second page under 2, as it were, interpretation, near the bottom, when sections 3(1)(a) through (d) are exempt. I can totally understand why some of those are exempt, but, I guess: why don't we specify that – when there isn't a minister, there isn't a deputy minister, there isn't a senior official, or whatever, how come we don't also put in that then that must be the Speaker?

**The Chair:** Ms Dean?

Like, the exemptions are there specifically to keep the separation between Executive Council and the government and the Legislative Assembly Office. The Speaker is the function of the policy, if you will, and the exemptions were put in intentionally to ensure that Executive Council or the government remained distant from us.

But I'm happy to hear from Ms Dean if you have any additional comments on that.

**Ms Dean:** Well, you're looking at an application provision that's in the Treasury Board directive. There is an application provision that's in the draft policy, which mentions "officers and employees of the Legislative Assembly Office," which, of course, includes the office of the Speaker. So if there needs to be clarity surrounding that, I'm sure some friendly wording changes could be accommodated.

**The Chair:** If the goal is to provide clarity around the office of the Speaker – the office of the Speaker in no way, shape, or form is intending to not be part of the policy that we provided direction to

MSC or the previous Speaker or the committee provided direction for the subcommittee to have apply, which is why in the document it says "the offices of the Legislative Assembly and employees" or whatever the verbiage is there. But I can't see any problem with providing clarity in that opening line. If you would feel more comfortable with it saying "and the office of the Speaker," I'm sure that we can find some agreement. That not being a substantive motion, I don't think that it requires a motion of the committee to allow the motion to provide the clarity, perhaps, that you're looking for.

**Mr. Dang:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we do have a motion, that was filed in advance, that I think encapsulates what I'm attempting to say here. I'm going to read it for everyone's benefit. It basically says: to move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct the LAO administration to revise the draft travel, meal, and hospitality expenses policy in section 2 as follows: by adding the following after clause (d), "(d)(i) 'Minister' would mean the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly," and then in clause (i) by striking out section 3(1)(a) through (d). That, I think, would give that clarity.

**The Chair:** I appreciate your submitting that motion prior. I'm not convinced that it actually does what you hope it does, but perhaps the Law Clerk could provide some additional comments around that.

**Ms Cherkewich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Member Dang, I appreciate it. I think we all understand what the intention is or the objective that you wish to achieve. I would sort of encourage maybe giving us some time to come back with a summary draft for you just because when we try to incorporate sort of what you've proposed – you know, in looking at it, it may not actually achieve the objective that you desire.

**The Chair:** Not only, Member Dang, does it unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge – now, we can certainly move it, and we can certainly vote it down if that's the will of the committee. In fact, I'm not even sure that we can move it because it's quite likely out of order because what, then, it implies when you remove the exemption is that all of the officers that are in the Treasury Board directive, which doesn't apply to us, then would apply to our policy. So when you remove one, it also inserts the other, if I'm correct, Ms Dean or the Law Clerk. I'm certainly not the lawyer amongst us. But if your goal is to ensure that the Speaker's office is included in the policy by clear direction, I would imagine that there'll be agreement amongst the members to explicitly say that in the opening of the policy.

**Ms Sweet:** Mr. Speaker, can I just get a point of clarity, please? We submitted these motions on the required timeline. My understanding is that my staff also met with the Clerk's office to make sure that we were in order on these, so now I'm confused as to why it's not doing what we asked it to do when we met.

**The Chair:** Sure. I would let the Clerk's office speak to that, but I would say that your office reached out to Parliamentary Counsel less than an hour prior to the motions being distributed, so as per the standing order the motions were distributed. There was no opportunity at that point in time for them to provide the clarity. Then I understand that they did meet with Parliamentary Counsel the next day. Now, that discussion, of course, would be subject to solicitor-client privilege, so I don't know what took place at that discussion. I'm happy to hear, if the Law Clerk can provide some

context, about what may or may not have happened at that meeting. I don't know if you're able to do so or not.

**Ms Dean:** Just to be clear, the Clerk's office was not involved in those discussions.

**The Chair:** Parliamentary Counsel was. Okay.

**Ms Cherkewich:** I'm happy to just clarify. We did meet, and just because of the lack of time in terms of ensuring that the deadlines were met, it was strictly a procedural form review. We weren't able to actually go in and assess the technical aspects.

**The Chair:** I guess the equivalent of what we have before us – and my goal here is to try to accomplish what you're hoping to achieve, not to be obstructionist in nature. This would be equivalent in the House to moving an amendment that wasn't signed off by Parliamentary Counsel.

**Ms Sweet:** I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I think, I guess, I just need you to understand my frustration in the fact that this was a process that we were notified about. We're trying to comply with it. I appreciate that we didn't do timelines, and there's some work on our end that we can definitely improve on, for sure. But given that it's a new process, I guess I'm just trying to figure out how we move forward in a way to accomplish what we can accomplish without having to adjourn this and restart. If not, then we're going to have to ask that this be tabled to another meeting, right? It would be ideal that we just move forward with the business of the day.

**The Chair:** Which is fair. I think the timeline – like, when we sent out the memo on Monday and said, "Please make sure you work with Parliamentary Counsel to ensure that they're in order," and then some period of time – I don't know the exact time that Parliamentary Counsel received the amendment prior to the deadline, Thursday afternoon. It was not possible for them to review that in any timely manner, but I agree with you on the business of the day.

I guess the real question is: what's the objective? If the objective is to make sure that the Speaker's office is included in the policy, we've provided a path forward for that.

While I think it's unfortunate that the wording of the motion provided doesn't accomplish – like, it makes the rest of the policy out of order. You know, I also want to find a solution for you where possible. If your objective is to make sure that the Speaker's office is in, I think that's a great objective.

Mr. Dang.

2:10

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we move forward and learn more about how to do this new process, that's something we'll have to work through. I think that perhaps the intent is essentially to make it that in the government travel, meal, and hospitality expenses policy any time that the Premier, minister, or associate minister is referred to, it means you. It means the Speaker, right? I recognize now that we don't have a motion available in that regard anymore because of this new process, but that would be the intent.

Perhaps with the graciousness of the committee we could move a motion to that effect or something because I think it's important that we have it in writing in the policy, right?

**The Chair:** I'm having a hard time understanding what the difference is between what you're asking for and saying at the outset of the policy that this policy applies to the office of the Speaker.

**Mr. Dang:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that there are certain clauses in here, particularly things like 13(4), for example – let me find it here now – where it specifies that this is the person that must approve the expense. For example, on alcohol and hosting expenses it specifies that this is the person that must approve the expense. I think we'd be more comfortable if it was specified who that person should be because with that exemption in place it doesn't specify in the directive who would approve those expenses.

**The Chair:** Teri, do you have a comment?

**Ms Cherkewich:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, I do appreciate the point that the policy does have an application section at the front, and that provision sets the rule for who the policy applies to. Section 2, the interpretation section, is what we would call a referential incorporation section, and that speaks to the application of the Treasury Board rules to be applied in certain ways. I can see that there can be bit of confusion around this because it's as though there were two application sections in the policy.

In terms of the best way to address this, I think that having some time to consider it with the objective in mind is always the best way to move forward with drafting because it can become quite technical.

**The Chair:** I guess – sorry. Mr. Dang, do you have any additional comments?

**Mr. Dang:** I think some of my colleagues may have something to say, and I'll wait for that first.

**The Chair:** Yes. Mr. Ellis.

**Mr. Ellis:** Yeah. Mr. Speaker, if I'm again to put it into terms that people like myself can understand, this isn't clear. I believe – and I don't want to put words in the Law Clerk's mouth – that what I was hearing was that to understand the objective, to make sure that this is a technical amendment, the Law Clerk and that portion of the department that works under you, Mr. Speaker, would just like a little bit more time to review everything. I'm not hearing anybody, you know, outright object to what Member Dang is asking for. It just seems to be unclear. Because of that nonclarity I just can't see how we can move forward with this particular motion until we ensure that the Law Clerk has been able to review this and that everything is in order.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dang.

**Mr. Dang:** Yeah. It seems that there is some work to do on this. I hate to say this, but perhaps we need to spend some time looking at preparing some more motions.

**The Chair:** Would you perhaps like to move a motion to adjourn debate on the topic?

**Mr. Dang:** Would I like to?

**The Chair:** Well, given that the first motion that you submitted doesn't accomplish the goal that you want, we can . . .

**Mr. Dang:** I won't comment on whether I'd like to, but I will move such a motion.

**The Chair:** We're more than happy to do that.

**Mr. Dang:** I will move such a motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. The motion to adjourn debate has been moved by the Member for Edmonton-South West.

**Mr. Dang:** South.

**The Chair:** South. Sorry. It's been a long Christmas break, Mr. Dang.

I would just say, particularly given that it's the first time that Standing Order 52.041 has been used, that I want to encourage members to reach out to Parliamentary Counsel as early as humanly possible. It's quite possible that that is the timeline that was used, as early as possible, but I think that the more expedient we can be in these things, the more the likelihood that we can get them accomplished while we are in the meeting at hand.

Having said that, all those in favour of adjourning debate, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone? Opposed?

That motion is carried and so ordered.

We will deal with that item of business at the next Members' Services Committee meeting, whenever that may be.

Have I missed anything, Jody? Are there any other items for discussion?

Seeing none, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

**Mr. Long:** Motion to adjourn.

**The Chair:** Motion to adjourn. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone? That motion is carried and so ordered. The committee stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:17 p.m.]







