



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Wednesday, January 20, 2021
10 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-2-3

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second 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)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, QC	Clerk
Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Stephanie LeBlanc	Clerk Assistant and Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Lianne Bell	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Chris Caughell	Sergeant-at-Arms
Ruth McHugh	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Darren Joy	Senior Financial Officer
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

10 a.m. Wednesday, January 20, 2021

Title: Wednesday, January 20, 2021 ms

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, committee members, staff, and others. It's a pleasure to have you joining us today. I'd like to call this meeting to order, the January 20, 2021, Members' Services Committee meeting.

My name is Nathan Cooper. I'm the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I'd like to ask those joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call upon members joining us on the phone or via video conference to do so as well. If we can begin to my right with the committee clerk.

Ms Rempel: Good morning. Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

Mr. Ellis: Good morning. Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West.

Mr. Walker: Good morning. Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park.

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

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

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

Ms Cherkewich: Good morning. Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk.

Ms McHugh: Good morning. Ruth McHugh, executive director, corporate services.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk of the Assembly.

The Chair: Before we turn to the business at hand and a few operational items, let's go to members on the phone or video conference.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA, Calgary-McCall.

Ms Goehring: Hi. Good morning. Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

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

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

Mr. Neudorf: Nathan Neudorf, MLA for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Deol: Good morning. I'm Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows. Thank you.

The Chair: I'd just like to remind everyone of the updated committee room protocols, which require that outside of individuals with an exemption, those attending a committee meeting in person are required to wear a mask at all times unless they are speaking. Based on the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health regarding physical distancing, attendees at today's meeting are reminded to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other participants.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, so there is no need for members to be turning them on and off. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. All video conference participants are asked to ensure that their cameras are on when speaking.

Please set your cellphones or other electronic devices to silent for the duration of our meeting.

We are now at point 2, approval of the agenda. Are there any additions, revisions for today's meeting? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have some comments or some clarification, and I think some of my colleagues will as well. I understand that at the previous meeting of this committee, as noted in the minutes, a motion regarding interpretive services was adjourned, and I'm wondering if there's an opportunity to discuss that today or at a later date and for some clarification.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Dang. I think both of those things may be possible. I didn't include it on the formal agenda for today's meeting as I was unsure at least of the duration of our deliberations around the budgets. From time to time those can take quite a while. If there is time remaining at the conclusion of the meeting, I would be happy to entertain a discussion on that point, but I think that we should do that based upon available time. If there is not time, then certainly at the next Members' Services Committee meeting I will ensure that that motion is returned to business arising from previous meetings.

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I appreciate that there's some consideration for the time. I would just like to note that this is something that is pretty common practice, that when it was adjourned, it would come to the next meeting, as practised in the past. I think that this is a really important motion that we should debate, at least to start the process of having the information necessary. I know that if we don't return to the debate that was adjourned, the message that is being sent to the deaf or hard-of-hearing community is that the members of this committee are not supportive of ensuring communication with them. So I would really hope that we can make some time to at least start the discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Goehring. I am super keen to have enough time, and I think that that will be at the committee's discretion with respect to the other items before the committee. So if that's something that you and other members of the committee would like to have time to move on today, there are very, very easy solutions to providing for that to happen, and that is to manage the time on some of the other agenda items, and then I would be super keen, and I'm hopeful that we can do that today.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Are there other items or additions or additional comments with respect to the agenda?

If not, I'm happy to have a member move the agenda as presented, with the knowledge that we've had a discussion about the possibility of other business. The hon. Member for Calgary-West, Mr. Ellis. All those in favour of the approval of the agenda, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones? In favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

Point 3, the approval of the minutes. Are there any amendments to the minutes from our last committee meeting? The minutes were circulated in the meeting package that was available on the committee website. If there are no additions, and seeing no one super keen to speak, I'm happy to entertain a motion for the

approval of those minutes. Mr. Walker. Are there any additional comments?

Seeing none, all those in favour of the motion to approve the minutes from our meeting of November 30, 2020, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones? That motion is carried. Excellent.

We are on point 4. As noted in the budget parameters document included in your budget package – that was from our November 30, 2020, meeting – the Members' Services Committee provided direction to plan for a hold-the-line budget for the overall Legislative Assembly Office, including the budget for the Office of the Speaker, with the exception of a modest increase in the parliamentary services budget, and that is to deal with the additional costs due to the increase in sessional hours.

Before I open the floor to discussion on the budget that was circulated in your package last week, I would, first, like to ask Ms Dean to provide a more detailed overview of the budget estimates. Then Ms McHugh will provide a detailed overview of the strategic business plan, and then we can ask some questions following that or have a discussion as a committee. Ms Dean.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, members of the committee. Before I begin with the budget overview, I wanted to provide a few comments on what has truly been an exceptional year. As with most organizations, the LAO has faced many challenges, but we've enjoyed many successes.

First and foremost, we have ensured that the Assembly and its committees could operate without hindrance during a pandemic. In fact, I think it's important to note that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta sat, by far, the most number of sitting days in terms of Assemblies across the country, so everybody has been working very, very hard.

Another one of our successes has been transitioning the LAO branches as well as caucus and constituency staff to working remotely where possible. Again, we were able to achieve this end within our existing budget allocation.

Now, as the Speaker noted and as indicated in the approved budget parameters document, we are seeking a modest increase in parliamentary services to account for an increase in sessional hours. For the sake of completeness, I want to point out to members that during the fiscal year 2019-20 we sat for 453 sessional hours, which is significantly higher than the 10-year average of 286 hours. For the current year we are projected to sit well beyond last year's figure, with a projection of 643 hours.

10:10

In terms of next year's budget, we are basing our budget on 80 sessional days, with an average of 30 hours per week. That translates to 600 sessional hours.

Now, in terms of the overall LAO budget it's important to be aware of what happened last year. We assessed our core services and determined what operational and programming changes could be made to accommodate a 5 per cent reduction without significantly impacting services for members. The LAO succeeded in this task, resulting in a bottom-line reduction of \$1.256 million, within which we have managed operations in the current year. We once again have assessed core services and adjusted where required, and our plan is to maintain a hold-the-line budget for 2021-22.

Now, by way of background, the LAO budget is approximately \$65.9 million and is comprised of three main components. First, LAO branch budgets. This accounts for approximately \$24.2 million, and it includes the Office of the Speaker, corporate services, parliamentary services, visitor services, the library, HR,

and committees. The second component of the budget is MLA administration, and it comprises approximately \$33.6 million. Key components there are remuneration as well as the member's services allowances. Finally, caucus budgets account for the balance of the budget.

As we've noted and discussed, we're looking for a modest increase in parliamentary services to deal with wage costs arising from increased sessional hours. We were able to accommodate these increased costs during this past year due to funds coming available as a result of reduced activity during the pandemic. In terms of what information we had on hand on November 30 in terms of projecting what kind of increase we were looking for, we estimated \$300,000. A further detailed analysis, based on our updated forecasts, suggests that what we're looking at is an estimated additional cost of approximately \$350,000, as described in your budget package.

I also want to point out that there have been some changes to staff benefits arising from premium rates. We have been made aware of increases to premiums in the areas of WCB, Blue Cross, and the federal CPP, and these have been adjusted in the budget accordingly.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the total voted LAO expenditure request is for \$65,915,000. This is \$567,000 over the prior year voted expenditures, and that increase has three components: first, \$47,000 attributable to the increase in CPP, Blue Cross, and WCB; \$350,000, as discussed, with respect to parliamentary services; and finally, \$170,000 in MLA administration, largely arising due to changes in the MSA funding formula that are driven by population statistics reported annually by Treasury Board and Finance. There's also a modest increase of \$22,000 due to the CPP, Blue Cross, and WCB premium adjustments.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. In closing, I'd like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Legislative Assembly Office staff, who have demonstrated their resilience, professionalism, and commitment during unprecedented times.

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

If we hold our questions, we'll hear from Ruth as well about the strategic plan, and then I'll have a couple of brief comments. Then we can get to the deliberations and any questions that members may have. Ms McHugh.

Ms McHugh: Thank you. Thanks, everyone. I'm happy to provide an update on how we're doing in implementing our LAO strategic business plan April 2020 to March 2023, Honouring Tradition while Embracing Change. I think you'll be impressed by the results that we've achieved in moving forward and implementing our strategic plan despite the challenging times that we're all operating in.

But just before I get into the update on how we're doing on our future-focused strategic plan, I thought I'd mention that we have completed our reporting on the results from last year. The LAO 2019-20 annual report was tabled by intersessional deposit on September 14, 2020. I hope you've all had a chance to read the report. If you haven't, it's available on our website. I'm relatively new to the team, but I have quickly come to realize that the LAO is a remarkable organization, resilient and determined, and it's made up of remarkable individuals who are also resilient and determined. The dedication of our people to provide exemplary service shines through in the pages of our annual report.

Now on to the strategic business plan. Of course, our plan was developed before we knew we'd be dealing with a global pandemic. You are all more than aware that in every organization it's fair to say that everyone's planned work and priorities have been disrupted. In my view, the LAO has done a remarkable job of

reprioritizing and reallocating resources to deal with the pandemic and mobilize our workforce for remote operations and continued top-priority service for members. We have proven that we are a determined and resilient organization, and we continue to learn and adjust as we go.

As we approach the halfway mark in our current fiscal year, which is six months in on our three-year plan, we gathered our management team to get a sense of where we were in implementing the actions that we had outlined in our strategic plan. We also took that opportunity to remind everyone about how our progress will be measured by revisiting the performance measures in the strategic plan. We learned from each manager about the progress on initiatives under their area of expertise. That gave us a strong sense of where we were overall and what we need to focus on during the second half of the fiscal year.

We examined our progress on each goal and all of the actions we had outlined to achieve our goals. We created a progress dashboard indicating what was on track to complete by 2023, what was not on track but we still think we can complete by 2023 with renewed focus, or what was not on track to complete by 2023 so we may need to course correct or rethink that goal or action. In reviewing our results, we learned that we had made good progress on all five of our strategic goals and the vast majority of the actions under each goal. We took heart in the realization that much of what we had to do to achieve remote operations turned out to be well aligned with our strategic priorities.

Now, I won't take up too much time in our meeting, especially since we've got other matters that we want to discuss at the end, but I thought it might be helpful to share one or two examples of actions taken and the changes made to deal with the pandemic that also moved us forward with our strategic goals. The LAO succeeded in not only mobilizing our diverse workforce to operate remotely in record time; we also set up committee rooms for remote video participation by members like this room we're in today. This involved our IT and broadcast teams not only implementing and mastering new technology as well as transferring broadcast functionality to accommodate distancing in larger spaces, but it also required our committees and House services teams to reimagine meeting logistics and how best to employ new technology to create the possibility for members to fully participate in committee meetings both in person and virtually. LAO committees have become adept at operating in this new hybrid manner.

This work was vital to the success of our continued operations during the pandemic, but it also moved us forward on goal 1, which is to "ensure the operations of the Legislative Assembly and its committees are effective and efficient and protect the traditions and privileges of the institution." One of our performance measures under goal 1 is that "proceedings in the Chamber and committee meetings, both on-site and off-site, take place as planned." Who knew what it would take in 2020 to meet that performance measure?

Another example is that the LAO's School at the Legislature program has moved to an online delivery method for our educational programming. For any who might not be aware, our visitor services branch offers educational programming to schools, mostly grade 6 classes since government is part of their curriculum. In the past we've enjoyed visits from over 25,000 schoolchildren each year. With field trips postponed during the pandemic, visitor services has developed virtual educational programs. The week-long School at the Legislature, now in its 20th year, is being delivered online. It continues to be very popular. The Speaker and Clerk participate in live interviews themselves and encourage branches of the LAO and the GOA to contribute whenever feasible. This popular program brings great value to educators and students,

and feedback from teachers on the new, more accessible delivery approach and compelling content has been impressive.

While the move to online delivery was precipitated by the pandemic, it is well aligned with goal 4 in our strategic plan, which is to "improve organizational accessibility, both internally and externally," and it's instrumental in achieving one of the key aspects of our mission, to promote public awareness and engagement in the work of the Legislative Assembly.

10:20

Awareness and engagement in the work of the Assembly are important for all Albertans, both big and little. School at the Legislature is a wonderful way to encourage Albertans from an early age. With online delivery we can now reach schools from across the province. While we hope to welcome classes back to the Legislature soon, in the coming years we can reach thousands of people virtually, providing an educational view into the work of the Legislative Assembly with a contemporary and convenient platform accessible to schoolchildren, community groups, and the public at large.

Our strategic business plan contains the guiding principles by which we make decisions to ensure that the good work we do is truly helping to strengthen parliamentary democracy for all Albertans.

Thank you so much for listening to our update.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Ruth, and let me also just say thank you to you and the finance team as well, who have done an incredible amount of challenging work over the last year, and also extend my thanks on behalf of all members to the Clerk and her team on the more parliamentary side. I am amazed at the great work, whether it's our IT department or our parliamentary services department, the significant shifts that we've seen in visitor services and School at the Leg. and the way that we've been able to still maintain the very important work that we do here on behalf of members and the Assembly and, perhaps more importantly, our democracy on a more broad scale. So from the bottom of my heart and on behalf of, I'm sure, all members, thank you to the LAO for doing that.

If I can add just one additional comment about School at the Leg. and the great work that's taken place there, I've actually had the opportunity to participate in more activities for School at the Leg. in the last three months than I had previously, when they were at the building, so it's been a really great opportunity to be able to do that.

The one thing that I am excited about is this great chance that we now have to continue a hybrid model, where, hopefully, we'll someday have 15,000 or 20,000 students still coming to our building but also that we'll be able to reach thousands of other students, in particular at the far reaches of our province, that are unable to come to Edmonton.

In every challenge there's an opportunity, and I think that the pandemic has shown us that as well. Thank you, everyone.

With that, I'm happy to open the floor to some discussion. Does anyone have any questions, comments, concerns, or otherwise with respect to the budget parameters document that you received in your package? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I've got a few questions, but I'll start with one, and we'll see how we get along. I guess that one of the questions I had is that there is an increase of I believe it's about \$567,000, yet the LAO consistently comes in under budget, right? I believe last year they were quite a bit under budget, and they do so on an ongoing basis. So maybe if that could

just be explained and we can look at opportunities on why we need a significant cushion like that.

The Chair: Sure. I'm happy to answer the first portion of this question, and then I'll turn it over to Shannon if she has anything additional. One of the reasons that the LAO continually comes in under budget and there's a large surplus remaining is that the largest portion of our budget is under MLA administration, and some of those budget lines are available to all members at all times, whether that is in the form of kilometres or costs in their MSAs, their member's services allowance, so we as an organization have no real path other than to budget as if those were going to be used by members. Consistently they are not all used by members, so that's why there is this opportunity or why the LAO often returns resources. We have taken some steps to change the total amounts on that, so we're no longer budgeting to a hundred per cent of those benefits, but that is the main reason why those two things happen. I'm not sure if Ms Dean has anything to add.

Are there any other questions? Thomas.

Mr. Dang: Yes, if there's nobody else. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess one of the other things I had was around – and I know Ms Dean spoke to how sitting hours were impacting the budget and how we're sitting a considerably higher number of hours than we have in the past, and we're trying to account for that. I guess I'm wondering if there's a difference in terms of if those hours are allocated in mornings or afternoons versus evenings. Will that have significant changes on how those are used?

The Chair: Ms Dean, I think if you have additional comments on this topic.

Ms Dean: The driving factor in terms of the budget is the total number of hours. Whether you sit mornings and afternoons to reach a certain hour quota or you sit afternoons and evenings, it's the number of hours that determines those wage costs. Again, Mr. Speaker, as you know, the standing orders currently provide for the possibility of mornings, afternoons, and evenings, so we have to accommodate all scenarios.

The Chair: Is there anyone else? Mr. Dang again.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Thomas Dang show today, apparently. I guess I have one more technical question. I'm not sure if maybe this will have to come back to me. I'm just seeing in the notes that the LAO is intending to move towards more of a digital-based system in terms of things like the transition to Microsoft Office 365 and other systems like that. I'm just wondering if there's a timeline for that and when we can expect to see that transition.

The Chair: Ruth, please.

Ms McHugh: Yes, there is a very aggressive timeline for it. We are determined to have this up and running for the start of the next Legislature.

Mr. Dang: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Neudorf has a question, I understand, on the phone. I'm happy to come back to Mr. Dang should you have any other questions. Mr. Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. More of a comment than a question. I do appreciate all the LAO's work on this budget. I think they've done a very good job over the past two years on all levels,

as I look at it, from bringing their actuals under their estimated amounts, whether it's under the Legislative Assembly Office branches or under the special funding or under the caucus budgets. I think it's very well thought through. I think they have shown a significant track record of two years of doing what they can to manage through some extremely difficult times, and I would just like to thank them for their efforts to continue to set realistic targets and then exceed those targets each year. I just wanted to compliment them that this year's estimate is about a million dollars under where they started in 2019. Again, if they have any further comments on each year and each of those segments, on how they were able to bring those under budget, I would appreciate hearing that, but more so I would just like to compliment them on the good work and the consistency of that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Nathan.

I don't know, Shannon, if you'd like to comment specifically to that.

Ms Dean: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, and I'll ask Ruth to supplement. We looked at our core services and did some streamlining last year. Notably, you know, we've eliminated one of the two constituency employee seminars. That was one of the significant savings. We also reduced the committees budget somewhat just because recent history was showing that we weren't expending all the funds in that envelope.

Anything else you want to add, Ruth?

Ms McHugh: No. I don't think so, Shannon.

Truly, thank you so much for that feedback, first of all. That's going to make a big difference to our people when they hear that. They have worked really hard. Every single branch manager has worked collaboratively with all of their people. I must tell you that when we were going through the strategic planning process – and it really was a collaborative process; I think everyone at the LAO can see themselves in this plan – we filtered decisions about: what is our core work, what is the most important work for us to do, and where can we focus and allocate those resources? Our strategic plan helps guide that work, and every manager and, I'm thinking, every employee is determined to do the best work with the fewest resources.

Thank you.

10:30

The Chair: If I might just add to that and add my thank you to Ruth and the team and Shannon and others specifically on this strategic plan piece. It was one of my desires to have our organization really get laser focused on our core values. I think they've done a great job over the last two years, and I look forward to the remaining two years of the 30th Legislature to see how we can ensure that we are well positioned going into the 31st Legislature.

Are there other questions?

Seeing none, I am prepared to have someone move a motion. I know that the motion would be that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the '21-22 Legislative Assembly of Alberta budget estimates in the amount of \$65,915,000.

Mr. Ellis: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Ellis.

Oops. Sorry, Mr. Long. I missed you there.

Mr. Long: I missed you as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Teamwork makes the dream work, doesn't it?

Is there other discussion on the motion? I just want to be certain that nobody else on the phones has any additional questions or comments prior to calling the question.

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question. The motion now appears on the committee screen, for clarity's sake. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone. In favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Thank you very much, members.

We are at item 5, an update from the subcommittee reviewing expenditure guidelines and Members' Services Committee orders. Members should have a copy of the interim report that was submitted by the subcommittee who were reviewing expenditure guidelines and the MSC orders, which was posted to the internal committee website.

I'd now like to turn to Member Ellis, the chair of the subcommittee, to speak to the business at hand of the subcommittee. Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly want to take a moment to thank all the members of the subcommittee, especially two members, Mr. Dang and Mr. Williams, for all the great input that they had, along with others as well. I'm pleased to report that the subcommittee began its review of the Members' Services orders and various expenditure guidelines in December. Several focus issues have been identified for consideration, and at our meeting on January 14, 2021, we began by considering potential clarification to the guidelines around orders in respect of MSA-funded communications.

As noted in the report, at the subcommittee's last meeting agreement was reached to recommend amending the constituency services order in order to provide an interpretive rule that reinforces that decisions about expenditures are at the discretion of members, subject to the orders and the authority of the Legislative Assembly and this committee, and to clarify that policy statements or opinions or information about programs or services that are contained in MSA-funded communications, materials are permitted so long as such statements or information relates to proceedings of the Legislative Assembly or its committees or activities undertaken in representing a member's constituency or constituents. In order to achieve these goals, the amendments to the constituency services order, as shown in the draft order provided to the members, would need to be made by the committee.

I would like to thank my subcommittee colleagues again – Mr. Dang, Ms Goehring, Ms Goodridge, Mr. Neudorf, and Mr. Williams – for their co-operation to date and express our appreciation to the LAO for their diligent work for supporting the subcommittee in its efforts.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Chair: Excellent. Are there others wishing to speak? I have a list. Mr. Dang, followed by Mr. Williams. Mr. Dang, please.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I just have some clarifying questions as to procedure here. If we approve the report, I suppose it is, the interim report, do we then have to separately approve the changes to the orders, or is it in one?

The Chair: It is a two-step process.

Mr. Dang: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: It's possible that the committee would approve the report but not approve a change. It would be unlikely, but it is possible. So it is a two-step process. The other thing that I would

add is that just because the subcommittee has reported on one particular issue, it doesn't preclude the subcommittee from reporting on other issues that may have arisen out of your initial discussions. Does that answer your question, Mr. Dang?

Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Chair. I would like to move a motion. They, I believe, have been submitted in advance, the motions I'd like to move. First, I'd like to move the motion accepting and approving the interim report from the subcommittee from January 2021 and the recommendations set out in the report. I recommend that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We can continue to have some discussion on that motion, and then we can entertain additional motions following the approval of this motion or the defeat of the motion. Did you have any additional comments on the motion?

Mr. Williams: No. Just that I'm happy to move another motion afterwards.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Member Sabir has requested to be on the list.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my first meeting at this committee, so I was not part of the subcommittee. I have been briefed by my colleagues, but I was not privy to all of the discussions. The way I'm reading the report and order, it appears to me that it will be giving some further discretion to MLAs about how they spend MSAs and how they use that to communicate, including their opinions. In the context of some recent news, where the MLA from Slave Lake or one MLA from west of Calgary were in the news about their expenses in newsletters, I was wondering about the timing of this discretion and whether instead of discretion, we needed some clarity about how we can spend it. But if MLA Ellis or anybody from the subcommittee can fill me in on that, I will appreciate that.

The Chair: Member Williams has suggested that he's happy to provide some context.

Mr. Williams: Sure. I mean, we can speak to the report as a whole and also to the proposed and recommended amendments to the Members' Services orders. I believe they're very clear in speaking directly to prohibiting and reinforcing the prohibition of partisan activity, which is outlined clearly in the orders. This doubles down on making sure it's clear that partisan activity is prohibited. I believe there are four markers used for that. It would be using party logos, fundraising dollars, soliciting votes, and selling party memberships. I believe those are the four outlined. I stand to be corrected if there are more.

I think, in my eyes and in the eyes of my constituents, that is a reasonable thing to make sure we're reaffirming, making clear that that is what is prohibited in the Members' Services orders. What is proposed by the subcommittee in that recommendation is a clause for greater certainty as well, which, I think, again reasserts that what we are looking for is clarity with that and that it brings clarity.

Those would be my thoughts and comments.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to provide thoughts or comments?

Seeing none, are there any other questions or comments on the motion before the committee?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on the motion as proposed by Member Williams that is before the committee that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services (a) approve the interim report of the subcommittee dated January 2021 and the recommendations set out in that report and (b) recommend that the Speaker table the report intersessionally on behalf of the committee.

All those in favour of the motion, 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.

Member Williams.

10:40

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Chair. I would like to move a second motion, that I believe has been previously distributed, that would consist of the language for amending the Members' Services orders. I think it's Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 33). Would you like me to read the amendments into the record, or should we just reference them as distributed?

The Chair: If you can just read the actual motion into the record that indicates No. 33, that's probably sufficient.

Mr. Williams: Sure. Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services makes the following order, being Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 33). One, the constituency service order is amended by this order.

The Chair: Mr. Williams, the actual motion that I'm referring to likely reads something like that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 33) as distributed.

Do you have that language there anywhere?

Mr. Williams: I don't know if I do right in front of me.

The Chair: Are you comfortable with that language there?

Mr. Williams: Okay. Sure. I am comfortable with that. Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: Beautiful.

Mr. Williams: It will save us some time.

The Chair: Perfect. Having seen the motion, I'll open it. Just double-check that this is the motion you were hoping to move.

Mr. Williams: Yeah, and I'll make comments afterwards if needed.

The Chair: Sure. You can go ahead and have your comments on that motion and some of the content or whatever you want, and then I see Mr. Dang is on the speaking list as well.

Mr. Williams: Yeah. I'm grateful for the work that the LAO staff did for the subcommittee and for the work of my colleagues as well on looking at this. I think it is a very reasonable amendment to clarify for members and for those administering the orders exactly what is prohibited in our Members' Services orders for communications. Again, as I mentioned earlier, it is explicitly that you cannot do partisan activity as outlined there, and it's the "for greater certainty" clause that allows us to reinforce that. I think it's something Albertans expect of us and is something that will add clarity and further help the LAO in their work in administering the

Members' Services orders and supporting members as they do their work on behalf of their constituents.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin and get into my comments, I'd like to thank Mr. Ellis and Mr. Williams for the work that we've done on the subcommittee as well. I think that there's been quite a bit of work done in quite a short amount of time.

I would like to echo some of the concerns that my colleague Mr. Sabir had made earlier. I think that as we are looking at the timing of this and as we are looking at the perspective of this, we've seen that there is considerable latitude being given to MLAs and considerable concerns being given around some of the materials that MLAs are putting out. I recognize that there remain restrictions on partisan activities and the four criteria that define partisan activity, but I am concerned around things, particularly around how some MLAs have been putting out communications around the public health emergency, around the effectiveness of masks, around things like that. I think that there is some tone-deafness in terms of the latitude requirement there. I think that while we all are setting out parameters around what would be considered partisan, I think that every member of this place, despite what the rules say, should be very cognizant of what they are putting in writing, of what they are communicating to constituents, and of the roles that we have and the obligation that we have to ensure the safety of Albertans and the confidence of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to speak to the motion?

Mr. Williams: I would like to thank Member Dang for the comment and agree. I think that for all members, it is incumbent upon them to be very cognizant of what they're putting in writing and the implications it has. I believe, ultimately, it is their responsibility to represent constituents they're elected for, but by no means should anything in these orders distract from that responsibility that all members have. I think that should still be abundantly clear, that independent of what any order says, we have a responsibility to exercise our moral judgment in spending public funds and acting on behalf of our constituents.

That said, I'm very glad that the language we have drafted is clear and provides more clarity for members and the LAO so that the members can do their jobs with more certainty in how they communicate. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join in the discussion?

Seeing and hearing none, unless someone on the phone catches me shortly, I am prepared to call the question.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I think what Member Dang said and what I indicated earlier is that the language is clearly expanding the discretion about opinions and all that. Again, from what we have seen previously in newsletters and what we heard about expenses, I think that at this time what we need is more clarity, not more discretion.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, on the motion as proposed by Member Williams, that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 33) as distributed, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone? In favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Well, hon. members, that brings us to point 6, other business. As I committed to previously, if there was time available, we would have a discussion on a motion that was previously before the committee. I'll remind members that the motion was included in the minutes of our last meeting, and I'll read the motion for you while the clerk gets it onto the screen for us to reopen discussion.

Moved by Member Dang that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct the Legislative Assembly Office administration to prepare (a) draft guidelines for the use of interpretative and captioning services and American sign language services for communications by private members as it relates to their parliamentary and constituency duties, (b) a draft order that would amend the Members' Services Committee orders to provide that the costs of interpretative and captioning services and American sign language services are reimbursable expenses under the administrative services order, and (c) a cost estimate in respect of the provision of the services in accordance with the draft guidelines prepared under clause (a).

Debate was adjourned by Member Ellis.

Is there anyone wishing to speak? Member Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just give me a second. I'm trying to get the camera to work. Fantastic. There we are.

I'm glad that we had time in our meeting to get to this. I think this is a very important issue at hand. With that, I would like to propose a motion, and I know that we didn't give notice in advance of this because I wasn't sure if we were going to get to this. Mr. Speaker, would you like me to read the wording of my motion? Then we can perhaps vote on whether we'll accept a substantive amendment.

The Chair: Yes. Just for clarity's sake, you are proposing that you would amend the . . .

Ms Goodridge: Sorry. I would move a new motion.

The Chair: Okay. The challenge with that is that there currently is a motion before the committee as it is what was debated and adjourned previously. If it is a subamendment or an amendment to the motion, that can work – I don't know what your proposal is – but currently in front of the committee is the amendment that is available on the screen, which is what's being debated. If you wanted to make an amendment, you could do that, or you could wait to see the fate, if you will, of the motion before us and then take it from there. I don't know what your plan would be.

10:50

Ms Goodridge: Apologies, Mr. Speaker. I got a little twisted on what was to go. I will work on my amendment as we speak.

The Chair: Okay. Member Goehring, I believe, followed by Member Dang.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am in full support of the motion that was moved by MLA Dang, that we look at the cost of using interpretive and captioning services. I believe that this is a community that deserves to have access to what's happening in Alberta. I believe that there are many from the community that would see this as a sign, just as an understanding that their needs are not being met with how we currently project our information to Albertans on the global kind of forum. Having this available I think only makes sense. I mean, we watched the world change as we're moving into different means of communication, and many have interpretive services available through American sign language when they're communicating what's going on with the pandemic.

I think that we could argue that American sign language is something that should be available to all Albertans that experience hearing concerns. I think that we've heard loud and clear from this community that they want to be engaged, that they want to be able to participate, and the best way to do that, to interact with democracy, to interact with what's happening in the Legislative Assembly, is to have these services. I think that requesting that the LAO move forward on preparing some information would be great, so I am in full support of this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry. I understand that Ms Goodridge wanted to potentially make a subamendment and that we might need some time for that. I'm wondering if the committee might entertain a five-minute recess so that we can see the wording on that specifically.

The Chair: I'm comfortable with that. I don't know; I'll just sort of take the temperature of some government members. Perfect.

The committee is in recess until 11 o'clock. That will give eight minutes for some work to be done. Feel free to grab a coffee or whatever. We will return. We'll come back to order at 11 a.m.

[The committee adjourned from 10:53 a.m. to 11 a.m.]

The Chair: All right, members. I call the meeting back to order. Thank you for your co-operation and understanding. Prior to getting back to the discussion, I know that Ruth brought something to my attention during the break that she would like to add, just for sort of context and consideration.

Ruth, please.

Ms McHugh: Well, thanks very much. Everyone has done a great job of acknowledging the importance of providing interpretive and captioning services to this important, you know, membership of our community. I just want to remind everyone that this is an eligible expense. This is already funded through the member's services allowance, just to remember that we do already have a provision for every member to incur this expense and claim it through their MSA.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Goodridge, are you prepared with an amendment to the motion?

Ms Goodridge: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I want to just apologize for the confusion earlier. I would like to amend the current motion by removing subsection (b) and (c) and adding a new subsection (b) that would read: committee requests for review at its next meeting a crossjurisdictional analysis of how constituency-related interpretive services, specifically ASL interpretation, are paid for in other jurisdictions in Canada.

The Chair: Okay. I would suggest that this is a substantive motion, which either requires unanimous consent of the committee or majority of the committee to approve the motion as it wasn't circulated. It looks like Member Dang wants to speak to this prior to either of those things happening.

Mr. Dang: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if we can get it on the screen for us to take a look at here. Of course, right now I think having discussion and more research on the issue is the beginning of the intent of my motion. Of course, it doesn't call for things to be brought in, but maybe I'll let you speak again.

The Chair: Yeah. One of the procedural challenges that we currently are in is that we have some proposed wording of the amendment, but we need to deal with whether or not the amendment can be heard. We either need a vote, which I think is the easiest thing, and then we can just proceed. I'm not sure how the motion is worded traditionally, but we need a motion that . . . [interjection] Yeah, it's a majority. I need a motion that

would allow the subamendment to be heard by the committee.

If someone would like to . . .

Ms Rempel: It's just agreement.

The Chair: Okay.

All those in favour of that, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. Okay.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Now we can get some proposed wording for you to review. I'll give Member Dang a moment to review it prior to calling upon him again, or is there any other member? Member Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you. I think that this – I really liked the initial intent when we had the original conversations around having the look at interpretation services because, quite realistically, our job as MLAs is clearly to communicate with our constituents, so making sure that we're communicating with all of our constituents and not leaving someone out is very important. I think that it's really important to look at this, and I think adding in for the committee's review at the next meeting a crossjurisdictional analysis on reimbursement of member's services in respect to members' use of sign language for the purpose of communicating with their constituents is something that is very prudent for us, to see how other jurisdictions handle this.

I know that if we were to ask research services to look at all different jurisdictions, that sometimes takes a little bit longer. I would probably propose looking at jurisdictions similar to some of the jurisdictions that we looked at in our democratic reform committee, which would be probably B.C., Saskatchewan, and Ontario, as they tend to be pretty good comparator provinces, and looking at what the federal government – how they treat this. I think interpretation is quite important, and making sure that we're communicating with our constituents, again, is critical to us doing our job.

With that, thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Member Goodridge.

Prior to continuing the discussion, I would just like to read the motion into the record and make sure that this accurately reflects what you were hoping for, Ms Goodridge, that

the motion be amended by striking out clauses (b) and (c) and by adding the following immediately after clause (a): "(b) for the committee's review at its next meeting a crossjurisdictional analysis on reimbursement of members' expenses in respect of a member's use of American sign language services for the purposes of communicating with their constituents."

Is that correct?

Ms Goodridge: Yes, that is correct.

The Chair: Excellent.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the discussion? MLA Goehring, please.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to clarify why the amended proposal takes out sections (b) and (c) as I think that those are important parts of the initial motion. I have no issue with

adding a crossjurisdictional – I think that that provides more clarity – but I struggle with why we're removing (b) and (c).

Ms Goodridge: Mr. Speaker, if I may?

The Chair: Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: I think that's a very good question, Ms Goehring. The primary reason why I thought it was important to remove clauses (b) and (c) is not to presuppose what the findings of the crossjurisdictional are. When we get the results back from the crossjurisdictional, I think we're going to be better suited as a committee to make those decisions and perhaps bring back those two clauses at a later date, perhaps with a new motion or amending the current motion. That was my rationale behind it. I just don't want to presuppose, and I don't want to be directing research services and the LAO to be doing a bunch of work ahead of doing the research on the crossjurisdictional.

The Chair: Are there others?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Mr. Ellis.

Ms Goehring: It's Nicole again . . .

The Chair: Oh, sorry. Let's go Mr. Ellis, and then I think that I heard Mr. Sabir indicate there, or was that Mr. Deol?

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll go Ellis and then Sabir and then back to you, Goehring, if that's fine.

Ms Goehring: Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'll try to be brief here. You know, I know lots of times in politics – and I've been doing this for, I'm going to say, a little while now – everybody wants to point out what the differences are, and there tends to be some debate, we'll call it, back and forth. I think it has been very polite, but, I mean, when I'm looking at what everybody is in agreement with – and I'm not seeing anybody disagreeing with this – it is that we need to ensure that all members of Alberta, folks that have any form of disability, including those who require sign language interpretation, are able to get the service from their MLAs as required, as any other person in Alberta. I see that commonality here.

What I am noticing is a bit of, we'll say, what there may not be an agreement with. What I heard from Ruth – and thank you very much – is that this is already baked in, we'll call it, put into your member's services, your MSA. And then I think where I'm seeing a little bit of discrepancy is that folks in the opposition may want this funding to come from somewhere else, for example, the Speaker's office.

11:10

I think that if we can just put aside the fact that everybody is agreeing that we want to make sure that people that require sign language services are taken care of – and I don't think that there's anybody who's disagreeing with this. I see that it just makes sense. Let's just figure out what all the other jurisdictions are doing or whatever has been proposed in this, what comparative jurisdictions are doing, and then, you know, we hear what the LAO has to say. We hear what comes back, and then we can have a discussion on it further.

I think we have to look at what we do agree on, and that's ensuring that everybody in Alberta gets services from their MLAs no matter who you are, and I think that's fair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments are somewhat on the same lines. We heard from the staff, I believe, Ruth. She explained that it's already covered, and it's a reimbursable expense. I think having information, a crossjurisdictional analysis, is good. At the same time, it's something that we all agree, that these members need to be included, and they need to be included as soon as possible. I think that without getting into a long process of getting crossjurisdictional analysis, we can find ways where we can more efficiently and more quickly make those services available to Albertans.

The Chair: Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Ms Goodridge, for your clarity. I still don't understand why you would want to remove those two sections, stating that we would just want to wait for a crossjurisdictional. I think that the work can be done together. I think that adding the crossjurisdictional to the current motion, by amending it just to include that, makes sense, but by removing (b) and (c), it creates the need for another meeting following the crossjurisdictional analysis. Your rationale doesn't make sense to why it's being removed, and I don't support the motion as amended.

The Chair: Are there others? Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it absolutely makes sense, and I think it would be incredibly important to have a meeting to follow the crossjurisdictional regardless. I think that it's absolutely prudent to make sure that we are making these decisions based on the best available information.

My experience: having sat on many of these committees that have been directing research services, who do an absolutely spectacular job, doing a crossjurisdictional, when you limit it to a certain few number of provinces, has a fairly quick turnaround time, and by being very precise as to what we are looking for, we will probably get a fairly rapid response back from them. Typically my experience has been in a 10- to 14-day range, and I think that is very timely, and I think that we should be making all of our decisions based on the information that we have at hand and not necessarily asking for them to be drafting recommendations without having that information on there.

That is my statement, and I would urge every member to vote in favour of this amendment. I think it really adds to this motion, and it speaks to our willingness and our interest in making sure that we are able to communicate with all of our constituents.

I think the comments made by Ms McHugh earlier signal that currently, right now, we are able to expense these claims to our MSA budget, showing that there isn't necessarily a huge pressing time limit where this is something that we can't currently do. We currently can do it; we're just looking for more clarification. So I would urge all of my colleagues to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: I have Member Deol, and I understand that Ms Goehring has an additional question.

I'd like to go to Member Deol and then come back to you, Nicole, if that's fine.

Mr. Deol: Can I go ahead, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Yeah. Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity. I really appreciate it. I just wanted to add some comments based on my experience in my riding that I come from, Edmonton-Meadows. This is one of the ridings where I deal with a number of different cultures, languages. It's hard to even count. I really needed to get support to see, like, what my challenges are within my riding. I needed to get the demographic information of my riding to deal with the languages, that are from the European countries, Caribbean, Africans, Asians, within those regions of the Middle East. What I want to say – I really didn't want to, you know, speak for the sake of speaking. I just wanted to convey the message to the members on the committee. I don't know if they know the kinds of challenges that the ridings like mine experience to communicate with the people, with the diverse cultures, different languages, to support those communities, to promote government policies or what we are doing as their representatives in their own languages.

What I wanted to say was that we are all on the same page and agreeing that there is the reasonable base of communities that exist, and they need the kind of mechanism developed that can include, provide them inclusivity. You know, they're entitled to get those services. What I wanted to say in the end was that I'm just kind of worried that when we're moving on this we do not – I would just be clear as we do not want to use the procedures just for the sake of delaying the matters that really need to be addressed. I think that on this we are very much on the same page. These services need to be included, but at the same time I just wanted to be a little more cautious. Please be a bit more serious as soon as we can come to the conclusion to include those individuals so that they have a mechanism to use the services.

That's all I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the member preceding me, Member Deol, for his comments. I think they align closely with the comments I made last time we had a committee meeting, where we see in my constituency that there's a wide array of Albertans, many of whom don't speak English as their first language. I went through a list of them from Dene to Cree to Tagalog to Low German, and I think it is appropriate that we consider all of the Albertans who have the same, you know, desire to communicate with their representatives and with their government on how the province is run. That's why I'm grateful that we have the member's services allocation, allowance of funds, so that we can communicate, as we heard earlier, and that that money is set aside for us to do that.

Thank you for those comments, Member Deol.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, comments on the amendment that's currently before the committee? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be very brief here. Certainly, while I agree that we should do our work in terms of getting crossjurisdictional analysis and having the best information, I think that I agree largely with my colleague Ms Goehring, that some of that work can be done simultaneously, right? We can have draft orders that are presented at the next meeting based on what the LAO finds from its crossjurisdictional, based on what happens. I think that it's pretty unfortunate that we're basically delaying the process by a meeting. In some cases it can be weeks to months between meetings, and I think that we'd like to move forward as

quickly as possible. That's why I believe that as proposed this amendment is insufficient.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here. I appreciate the debate on this amendment. I'm in agreement with the amendment, particularly in the sense that we don't have all the information yet in hand, and I think a cross-jurisdictional is important, particularly the original amendment, point (b). To change Members' Services Committee orders at this time I think is actually irresponsible without having the information in place first. That's my major concern. We're talking about changing committee orders and costing and changing allocations to budget, because it would remove budgets from MSA and place that back onto the LAO budget. I think these are actually fairly significant moves, and to do that without the information in hand at this time is really ill advised. For those reasons, in particular, I fully support the amendment being brought forward and thank everybody for participating in this debate.

11:20

The Chair: Are there others on the amendment? Seeing and hearing none, I'll give one more opportunity for those on the phone.

I'm prepared to call the question on the amendment as proposed by Member Goodridge. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

We are now on the motion as amended. Are there any other further questions, comments? Member Dang would like to speak.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I'm just waiting for the motion wording to come up as amended. I think it's pretty straightforward now, though. I think that while we're very disappointed that this means that there would be significant delays in terms of implementing a potential new policy and in terms of seeing the outcomes of that policy being beneficial to Albertans, I think that, certainly, I would still like to see this process move forward. I would still like to see us continue to do this work, and I would like to see this committee continue to have the opportunity to explore this in the future. I mean, even though I think this slows down the process, even though this reduces the ability for us to have those conversations in the short term, I'm optimistic that we'll be able to continue to have this conversation perhaps at the next meeting of this committee, depending on how long it takes for us to get the analysis. I understand that timelines might be a bit tricky now as we enter into the budget estimates process in the next few weeks to months, but I hope that we can continue to have this conversation and have a positive outcome as a result of it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent.

Are there others? Ms Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to echo Member Dang's comments. I am fully in support of us moving forward as a committee looking at ways that we can better support communication with those that are hard of hearing. However, I'm disappointed that the previous motion was amended as it was, that now, unfortunately, it's going to cause delays for a service that everyone around the table is saying that they are in support of. I'm pleased to see that this work is continuing. I just want it noted that I'm disappointed that there's now going to be a delay because of

the way that the government member provided the amendment. I support the work that we're asking the LAO to do. I believe that this is something that we should be providing to Albertans. I just wish that it had been able to move a little bit faster so that we could get this done in a more time-effective way.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Member Goehring, thank you for your comments. I just wanted to make sure that you are aware that if there is a constituent between now and any potential policy change in the great constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs that requires ASL services in your constituency office, you will be able to ensure that their needs are met and that that would come from your MSA budget.

Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to say what you, in fact, just said, that these services are available and continue to be very important, that we're just discussing where the cost comes from and that every member has their MSA budget to be able to resource and allocate those funds for this service. Thank you again to the LAO for providing it, and thank you for clarifying that this service is available to every member of Alberta in the best way possible.

The Chair: Are there other questions or comments?

I'm prepared to call the question on the motion. Last chance on the phone. All those in favour of the motion as amended, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Are there any other issues? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to raise another issue. I think that given the emergent nature of this issue and that it was after the deadline for motions, I'm hoping my colleagues will indulge me a little bit. I'm speaking to the concerns raised around the Member for Lesser Slave Lake's expenses that came to light relatively recently.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that members of the public have been asking for this expense issue to be rectified and that the member has even publicly admitted that many of these expenses were claimed in error. To be very clear, every member in this place knows, as we have all submitted expenses before, that at the bottom of the expense claim forms you must personally certify that the expense was filed properly and in accordance with the orders of this place. So I think that the action of rectifying these errors would be the right thing to do for all members.

With the indulgence of the members of this committee I would like to move a motion, which I would like to read at this time.

The Chair: Well, I am not sure there is the need for you to move a motion. You know, you earlier raised an issue for other business that you would like to have on the agenda. Typically speaking, you would have also given notice at that time. Yes, I appreciate the fact that we have passed the motion period where it would have been requiring consent of the committee to move a motion, but if you had some desire to speak about this issue in other business, it certainly should have been raised when you provided notice of your desire to speak to the issue that we just concluded.

Having said that, I will provide some comments, and then the committee can make a decision and go from there. Any of the expenses that the LAO is asked to approve are approved based upon whether or not they are in compliance with the Members' Services orders. So those specific expenses – while I am hesitant to get into individual expenses at a committee as that is not the role of the committee, it could be the role of the committee at the end of a

process for appeal and correction and that sort of thing. Typically that situation is not dealt with at the committee level at the outset.

But given the public attention, I'll provide the following comments. One, those expenses were approved by the LAO based upon whether or not they were in compliance and on the information they had at the time. Yesterday I became aware through a post that the member had admitted that some of those expenses may have been submitted in error. I reached out to the member immediately, as I would when I became aware of any expenses that were not submitted appropriately, and indicated to him that he would be required to repay those expenses, and he has agreed to that. So I am not sure that there's further discussion that's required as he's committed to repaying those expenses, and the issue wasn't raised at the time that would be appropriate in the meeting. I think we've had an opportunity to discuss it. I'm not sure that there's any further need.

Mr. Dang.

11:30

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to reply. I guess my comment would be that I'd still like the opportunity to present my motion. It's common practice in this committee and in other committees that under other business other motions may be presented even if they were not identified at the outset. That's why we continue to have the other business item in the agenda. Typically the chair and, in your case, Mr. Speaker has called for whether there is other business before a motion to adjourn is called. I would submit that I still request the permission of this committee. I would like to read a motion that may be voted on.

The Chair: Perhaps while I'm disappointed that you didn't raise it at the appropriate time in the meeting, knowing that this was your desire and knowing that you had moved another point of business earlier today, I think that it's reasonable for you to read the motion, and then the committee can decide whether or not that motion will be heard by the committee, given the comments that have already been made on the record by the Speaker.

Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move a motion – sorry. I seek permission to move a motion. I would move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services (a) request the chair send a letter to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake requesting him to work with Legislative Assembly Office administration to identify and rectify any inconsistencies relating to claims under the members' allowance order that may have been submitted in error and inviting the member to appear before the committee to explain how those errors were made and (b) establish a subcommittee to review this matter for the purpose of providing within 60 days recommendations to the committee on how members can ensure that these types of errors can be avoided in the future.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Dang.

I won't provide any comment, but I will put the question to the committee as to whether or not, by majority, they would like to hear that motion.

Do you have that motion all ready there?

Ms Rempel: Yes.

The Chair: I'll give you 30 seconds to read it prior to voting on it. I think typically this process takes place without debate, but given the length of it, I think it's fair that people know what we're voting on.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Mr. Ellis, if you'd like.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Just to be clear, we're not voting on this motion that Mr. Dang has requested of the independent member; we're just voting whether or not to continue discussion on this, which you were very articulate in explaining your reasons. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. I am prepared to put the question on

whether or not we will continue debate on this matter.

All those in favour of the motion as proposed by Member Dang, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, no? On the phone, yea?

That motion is defeated.

Mr. Dang: Recorded vote, please.

Mr. Sabir: Can we have a recorded vote, please, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Yes. As members know, I do enjoy the procedure. Typically speaking, if you're hoping for a recorded vote, that would be asked for in advance, but it is not the end of the world that it wasn't. How we will do this is that I will call members' names. They will indicate yea or nay, and then we will proceed.

Member Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: No.

The Chair: Member Walker.

Mr. Walker: No.

The Chair: Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: No.

The Chair: Member Long.

Mr. Long: No.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Yes.

The Chair: Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: No.

The Chair: Member Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: No.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

The Chair: Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: Yes.

The Chair: Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Yes.

The Chair: Hon. members, the in favour is four; the against is six.

That is defeated.

Are there any other items?

Seeing none, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. Mr. Long, thank you. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, aye? Opposed? The motion is carried. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:35 a.m.]

