



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, October 18, 2021
9 a.m.

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Second Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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

Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Vacant

Also in Attendance

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, QC	Clerk
Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
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>

9 a.m. Monday, October 18, 2021

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, members. It's a pleasure to see you all on this beautiful Monday morning. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

My name is Nathan Cooper. I'm the MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I would like to ask members joining us at the committee table to introduce themselves for the record, and then I'll call on members joining the meeting remotely to introduce themselves. If we can go all the way around the table, beginning with Ms Rempel, if you can state your name and your position, that would be exceptional.

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

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Jeremy Nixon, Calgary-Klein.

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

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

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

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk.

The Chair: If we can go to the phones, starting with Member Goehring.

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

The Chair: Member Sabir. I can't hear you, Member Sabir. Do you want to just double-check your mute there?

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. Good morning, Mr. Speaker and all of you. Irfan Sabir, MLA, Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Deol: Good morning, everyone. Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Williams: Dan Williams, the MLA for Peace River. I apologize. I likely won't be turning on my camera as I just have a poor connection but happy to be here.

Mr. Sigurdson: Good morning, everyone. R.J. Sigurdson, MLA for Highwood.

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

The Chair: I believe that there may be an independent member who has also joined us on the call.

Mr. Barnes: Yes, there is, Speaker. Drew Barnes, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Are there others? Excellent. Thank you very much.

I would like to remind everyone of the current committee room protocols.

Oh, Member Loewen, if you want to introduce yourself for the record, I would appreciate that.

Mr. Loewen: Todd Loewen, MLA, Central Peace-Notley.

The Chair: I would like to remind everyone of the current committee room protocols, which require those attending the committee meeting in person that they must wear a mask at all times unless they are speaking and that all attendees maintain the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants. Please note that microphones are operated by *Hansard*, so members do not need to turn the microphone on or off themselves. The committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. All videoconferencers are asked to ensure that their cameras are on when they're speaking unless you have a connectivity problem and you're in northern Alberta. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

With that, I move us to the approval of the agenda. Are there any proposed additions, revisions for today's meeting's agenda? If not, would a member move the agenda?

Mr. Neudorf: So moved.

The Chair: Hon. members, Member Neudorf has moved the adoption of the agenda. Is there any discussion? Seeing none, all in favour in the room, aye? Any opposed, nay? On the phones in favour? Opposed? Carried.

With that, that brings us to the approval of the meeting minutes. The motion, once it's moved, will be that the minutes of the June 14 meeting of 2021 of the Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved. Is there anyone willing to make that motion? Member Neudorf. Is there any discussion on the approval of the minutes? Seeing none, all those in favour of the approval of the minutes, please say aye. On the phones, please say aye. Any opposed, please say nay. On the phones? The motion is carried.

This brings us to item 4 on the agenda. Item 4 is the COVID-19 protocols. I'd like to start off this item of business by reiterating my recent remarks with respect to a vaccine policy for members. As I've noted publicly in the media, Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta are masters of the Assembly proceedings. Accordingly, it is the Assembly alone that may, through the passage of a motion or an amendment to the standing orders, implement a vaccine policy in connection with members and the Chamber. Of course, committees may make recommendations to the Chamber, but it is the Chamber alone that can enforce the implementation of those rules.

In addition, in terms of vaccine policy for employees in memos that I sent out on October 8, 2021, and additional information on October 15 to whips and all members of the Assembly, I clarified announcements made by the Premier and the Public Service Commissioner that indicated that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta employees includes that caucus and constituency staff are members of the public service accordingly. The policy on vaccine requirements for employees that applies to public service employees also applies to members of the Legislative Assembly Office unless this committee, the Members' Services Committee, orders an exemption or a variation to this policy.

With that said, employees of the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta are required to meet the same standard of rapid test or vaccination for employment here, with the exception, again, unless the Members' Services Committee creates an exemption for this policy.

With that as background, I understand there may be some discussion on this matter. Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you.

The Chair: Oh. Sorry, Member Dang, to interrupt.

Please indicate your desire to speak to this issue by letting the clerk know or, if you're in the room here, a show of hands, and I'll be happy to include you on the list.

Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate the comments that you have provided both today and previously in the media. I think that certainly we know members are the masters of their own domain and with respect to the Legislature, and I think it's important that when we look at the public health situation and the evolving public health situation across the province, we have a consistent policy that is followed and demonstrated by leaders in this province. We know that this committee has done that work in the past. I know that government members, I think at the very first meeting of this committee, stated quite clearly that they wanted to lead by example, and that's why they were making changes to things like MLA salaries and so on. I think that members of the government should agree that we need to continue lead by example, particularly so in such significant situations as this public health emergency.

With that, I do have some more comments, but I'd like to make a motion that was submitted under Standing Order 52 first, so that can be on the screen while I speak.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Dang. If you give the committee clerk just a moment here to get this motion available. For members of the committee, I believe this motion was posted to the committee website late last week on Thursday and was available for you there and is now available on the screen for all other members.

Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Do you want me to read that in?

The Chair: I think for the purposes of the record that would be beneficial.

9:10

Mr. Dang: Sure. I would move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services recommend that the government introduce a motion in the Assembly on the first sitting day of the fall 2021 sitting that states the following:

Despite any standing order or practice of the Assembly and for the duration of the 30th Legislature or until the Assembly passes a motion rescinding this motion,

- (a) an individual, including a member, may not physically access the Legislature building or any other area in which the proceedings of the Assembly, including its committees, are being conducted unless the individual provides proof of one of the following to a Legislative Assembly Office employee designated by the Speaker for this purpose.
 - (i) Full vaccination against COVID-19 by means of the quick response code made available to the individual by the government of Alberta.
 - (ii) An exemption from vaccination based on a protected ground of the Alberta Human Rights Act.
 - (iii) In the case of an individual who is 11 years old or younger, the age of that individual is as provided by a parent or guardian.
- (b) The Office of the Speaker is responsible for administering the conditions of access to the Assembly and its committees as prescribed in clause (a).
- (c) This motion comes into force on passage.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a pretty clear motion. We've seen across this province businesses implementing vaccine passport

programs. We've seen businesses across this province now being able to check QR codes. I mean, that was significantly delayed. I think it was a significant gaffe by the government to release QR codes without being scannable, but we're beyond that now, businesses even before that manually checking identification against vaccination records for the vaccine passport purpose and ensuring that if you want to go into a restaurant and get a slice of pizza, people had to be fully vaccinated or partially vaccinated until a certain point and have that record verified by the place of business.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that if these are the measures that the government wants to have in place across the province and these are measures that we believe are effective against COVID-19 and that every single MLA in this place believes vaccination is an effective means to get past this pandemic, to get on the other side of this emergency and to be able to reopen Alberta for real, not just for summer but for real – because this government promised that they would open Alberta for summer, and they did that, but now in the fall we're back into restrictions and we're back into vaccine passports that they had to be dragged kicking and screaming to.

Here's an opportunity for the government to actually lead by example. Here's an opportunity for every elected member of this place to show that we believe vaccinations are safe. I know that the Government House Leader has said, "Oh, all of our caucus members have been or will be vaccinated except for one for a medical reason," but, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's sufficient. I don't think it's sufficient because for every single other Albertan, if you walk into a movie theatre right now, if you walk into a restaurant right now, they're going to ask you for proof that you're vaccinated. They're going to ask you to show that record. Instead, this government has asked us to take them at their word.

We've seen other Conservative Premiers do the same thing and have to walk back those comments. Scott Moe just a couple of weeks ago, the Premier of Saskatchewan, had to actually kick a member of his caucus out because of a fake proof of vaccination, so we don't think it's sufficient that government members tell us to take them at their word. Albertans have been taking them at their word for months, particularly during this pandemic, and I think it's very clear that we need to have a real measure in place that allows us to keep this building open. Right now our galleries are closed. We can't have members of the public, we can't have media in these rooms, we can't have them in the Chamber when we come back in just a few weeks here, and I think that's a shame. We need to have real policies in place that are going to protect members, protect staff, protect the public and show the public that we are serious when we're talking about dealing with this pandemic, we're serious that vaccinations work, and we're serious that we believe in the science and we trust in the process to ensure that we can get out the other side of this pandemic.

I look forward to hearing comments from some of my colleagues here, but hopefully we'll all be able to agree that this is a necessary step and this is something that will allow us to show the province that we believe in vaccinations.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Dang.

For the purposes of the committee and for the record, I believe that Member Ellis has joined the committee meeting. If that indeed is the fact, could you introduce yourself, please, Member Ellis?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Mike Ellis. I am the Member for Calgary-West. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Member Ellis.

Are there others wishing to speak? Member Nixon.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'd like to comment a little bit about this motion and some of the comments that were just made. First of all, for clarity, in order to access restaurants and other services in the community, we did give the option of both double vaccination or proof of a negative COVID test, which is what the Government House Leader has announced to the media in regard to access to the Chamber for MLAs. My concern about this motion is that it does create a bit of a double standard in that regard.

My larger concern is that this committee and its role should not be about recommending anything to the Legislature that is going to restrict private members' access to the Chamber. Members are duly elected by their constituents to be in that Chamber and be able to represent those constituents and vote, and for us to be putting forward a motion that would potentially restrict members from accessing the Chamber because of their personal health decisions is quite concerning.

I am part of a caucus that has made an agreement in regard to implementing a policy amongst our members to be vaccinated or provide proof of a negative test. I support that announcement by our House leader in regard to moving forward that way, but I do want to make it clear that I find it very concerning that we at this committee would be proposing anything that would be restricting a member's access to the Legislature and bringing up a point of privilege and, frankly speaking, blocking that member from even being able to access the Chamber to make that point of privilege.

For all of those reasons, I will be voting no to this, and I encourage all of my colleagues to do so as well.

The Chair: Are there others? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that's, frankly, ridiculous. I think it's, frankly, ridiculous that we're sitting in this place and members of this Legislature, members of the UCP caucus, don't believe in the effectiveness of vaccinations. We saw in the spring session and last year as well that we were able to have virtual means of participation in the Legislature. We were able to have virtual voting. We've seen other Legislatures, not just in Canada but across the world, implement virtual debate mechanisms as well. We can have real measures in place if people are unwilling to prove their vaccination status or unwilling to get vaccinated, and frankly we don't know which one of those it is because UCP members will not prove to the public that they actually have been vaccinated.

Beyond that, the point of privilege argument is, frankly, ludicrous. We've canvassed this extensively. You yourself have said – and you can correct me, Mr. Speaker – that members are the masters of their own domain. Members are able to make those rules in the Legislature, and we can make that recommendation here at committee. If that rule was in place, it would be no different than any other standing order that limits access to the Chamber. Mr. Speaker, if you or I weren't wearing a tie, we would be thrown out of the Legislature. Those are the rules we put in place for ourselves here.

To suggest that we can't do something that keeps others and ourselves safe, to demonstrate to the public that vaccinations are safe, to show that we are willing to stand with the same rules as everybody else, to show that we are willing to have an effective means to get past this pandemic with everybody else simply because this member thinks, UCP members think, "Oh, well, we need to not limit people's access with one additional rule on top of all the other ones that we ourselves have made up for this place," Mr. Speaker, is, frankly, ridiculous. It doesn't make any sense.

Technical options exist and can be implemented in time, and we would be happy to accept an amendment that would allow us to take some time to implement technical tools in terms of allowing members to participate. The member saw this motion as we submitted it in advance under Standing Order 52, and if the member actually believed that was a legitimate reason to vote against this, I would hope that the member would have submitted an amendment. We didn't see an amendment submitted.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing here today is that we're seeing UCP members push back against the science of vaccines, we're seeing UCP members push back against public health policy that will actually make a difference, and we're seeing UCP members refuse to stand and lead by example for the rest of the province, refuse to use the same rules they're putting in place for everybody else. Indeed, I think it shows that these UCP members that are going to vote against this are not serious about the vaccine passport program.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Deol, followed by Member Neudorf.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank you, Member Dang, for bringing in this motion today and speaking so eloquently and effectively to this motion. I was a little surprised and discouraged listening to Member Nixon's comments on this. What this motion is basically saying is that this is enforcing what the government, the Premier and the UCP government, has been saying to Albertans for the past some time, and if they don't want to move forward and support this motion, then I don't know what this means of the government's announcements around the million-dollar lotteries, the \$100 benefit to encourage vaccination uptake.

9:20

If the members of this Assembly, the representatives of Albertans, don't want to be held to the same standards – they want to be excluded from those same health orders that we are asking the public, Albertans, families, businesses, and each and everyone in this province to follow to contain the virus so we can go back to normal life, so we can focus on the economy again. This is simple. Once again, I'm sorry to say and sorry to see that by opposing this motion, the government is obviously once again demonstrating the mixed messaging that has actually, you know, been quite damaging to the province in the past, and it seems that the government members and the government have not learned any lesson. I think it's a very legitimate, reasonable ask in this motion, to do the same that we're asking the public in Alberta to do.

I think we need to support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Member Neudorf, please.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of things are concerning as the arguments from the opposition come forward. They want consistency with what we've asked all Albertans to do, which is actually not in this motion. What we are proposing is that we follow the recommendations of the Public Service Commissioner, which is either to be double vaccinated or show a test within 72 hours of a negative COVID infection.

Further to that, it is beyond the mandate of this committee to dictate to the Assembly how they should act. As you said, Mr. Speaker, it is the Assembly alone that can govern the actions of those within the Chamber, so it is our actions that show leadership and leading by example. Again, the opposition has already acknowledged and so has our Government House Leader that at the beginning of session it is very likely that other than one member

going through some personal medical challenges, the government caucus is expected to be fully vaccinated.

We do want consistency of regulation. We do want consistency of message to the people of Alberta, which has been consistent for some time, that they can be double vaccinated and show that proof of vaccination or have a negative COVID test within 72 hours. Anything beyond that is much different than compelling or encouraging or requesting Albertans to be vaccinated. That is their decision to make, and that is the freedom of a free and democratic society that we now have, that people get to choose. They don't always choose what we would like them to choose. The opposition, more than anybody, should understand that as they were not chosen to govern the province at this time. Albertans chose the United Conservative Party instead. We basically are allowing that freedom of choice, and we are providing that consistent recommendation in alignment with the Public Service Commissioner.

I would urge all my colleagues to vote against this motion.

The Chair: I have Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a bit surprised to hear government opposition to this motion and their assertion that it somehow restricts the access of members. As you have mentioned – and it's pretty clear – members can come up with their own procedures and regulate proceedings, access, everything. One simple example that my colleague MLA Dang mentioned is that we put in a dress code, and without being properly dressed, we are not able to access the Legislature. That's one simple thing.

Requiring vaccine passports is not restricting anybody's access; it's just regulating access to the Legislature. We are doing that in the context of a global pandemic that cost Alberta almost 3,000 lives. Still there are 15,000 Albertans who are recovering from that virus, and it still poses a threat to our society. As leaders, as elected representatives we need to send a strong message that if we are asking Albertans to get vaccinated, if we are offering them incentives to get vaccinated – on many occasions even the Premier has said that the pandemic we are now seeing is that of unvaccinated people. The burden we are seeing on our hospitals is that of unvaccinated Albertans.

If we want to send a clear message, if we are asking the public service to be double vaccinated, I think that's a pretty simple, straightforward motion that will send a very clear message that that's what elected representatives are doing, that's what we expect from Albertans. I don't think it has anything to do with member access to the Legislature. It's just regulating the process, how we want to access the Legislature and how safely we can do that.

I think it's a very common-sense motion, and I urge all members to support this motion.

The Chair: Are there others? I have Member Dang again. I just want to make sure that – Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to reply briefly to Mr. Neudorf's comments, I think that they are, frankly, outrageous. When we look at the very policies being put in place in this province, we actually know, thanks to a newsletter by Member Allard, that Dr. Hinshaw's recommendation to the UCP caucus, the UCP government, was not to have a testing option, so when Mr. Neudorf comes in this place and says, "This is based on the recommendations that we have these multiple options in terms of vaccination passport requirements," that's simply not true. We know that the UCP members and UCP caucus undermined the public health system. They undermined the recommendations, and they specifically weakened the rules that were going to be

recommended by Dr. Hinshaw. I think it's outrageous that the member would come in this place and make those claims.

I think it's also outrageous that we have in this place members who simply do not understand that Albertans don't believe them when they say that they're leading by example. We see other conservative governments having to kick out members of their caucus for lying about their vaccination status. When these government members come up to us and say, "Take us at our word; we're vaccinated; our Government House Leader has said that," that's not good enough for Albertans. That shouldn't be good enough if we're going to be leading by example. If we're going to be leading by example, we need to be doing the same thing as every single other Albertan.

These members need to show their QR codes. They need to show the proof. They need to tell Albertans that they are vaccinated, they believe in vaccinations, and the vaccines are safe. It simply does not make any sense that we see members time and time again continue to undermine these public health rules, continue to undermine the requirements, and, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Neudorf: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations against other members. MLA Dang on numerous occasions in this time speaking has alleged that members of the UCP caucus have undermined the public health orders. That is clearly an overreach and an extreme statement, of which he has no proof. The NDP caucus has deliberately taken messages and twisted them to their convenience. It is beyond the pale that they would continue to do so, especially when those members are not here to defend themselves. I believe he should withdraw and retract.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that clearly this is a matter of debate. I did not refer to individual members undermining public health orders. Though I did refer to individual statements by members, I did not refer to those statements as being the action of undermining. Mr. Speaker, you yourself have ruled on this many times.

I want to read for you a quote from Member Allard's newsletter – and I think that will colour some of this – which is:

I want you to know that is the reason there is a negative test option as an alternative. This was not the recommended option when this policy was first presented to caucus. As much as I value freedom and choice, I cannot ignore the hospitalization rates and the reality before us.

Mr. Speaker, that's the end of the quote.

Mr. Speaker, very clearly we see these documents and statements coming out in public, and we see members of the UCP caucus continuing to make these statements and continuing to put out these newsletters that state these things that, I believe, undermine public health orders. Certainly, the debate around the level and degree of that and whether members but not an individual member are doing that is debate and not a matter of a point of order.

Thank you.

9:30

The Chair: Are there others? Sorry; you've had an opportunity to provide your argument. We don't typically go back and forth on a point of order.

I'm prepared to rule. I would suggest that Member Dang stick to the content of the motion as opposed to providing significant colour commentary. While I would agree this is a matter of debate, the language is unlikely to be helpful, particularly in a committee setting. I understand that they are sometimes very different, the House and the committee, so I encourage him to stick to the matter at hand.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to wrap up my comments here, and I'll ensure I try not to cause disorder in this place. But certainly when we look at this motion, when we look at the clauses laid out in this motion, this motion closely resembles the actual measures that should have been in place across the province. It closely resembles the actual measures that were recommended to the UCP caucus, and indeed it brings in alternatives such as exemptions based on protected ground under the AHRA, that would ensure that members who have a significant reason not to be vaccinated are able to prove that and are able to show that.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we have members refusing to bring in the simplest requirements to ensure vaccination in this place. We have members refusing to bring in the lowest bar. If you want to go and have a slice of pizza inside of a restaurant and sit down and have that slice of pizza, you have to show your vaccination status. This is what we are asking every single Albertan to do right now. If Albertans are going into restaurants and getting breakfast as we speak, they are expected to show their proof of vaccination. Instead of doing the same thing, this government continues to want to have a separate set of rules for themselves than the rest of Albertans. They continue to have a double standard for themselves versus Albertans.

I think it cannot be more clear that this government is not serious about the vaccine passport than that they are refusing to put it on themselves, refusing to prove the same requirements themselves, and refusing to have the same requirements as every single other Albertan. Mr. Speaker, the idea that we are trying to impose this on this Assembly and this committee, the idea that we are trying to somehow breach the privileges of members of this committee, the idea that government members keep on bringing up, saying that there is some procedural reason we shouldn't be bringing forward this motion, I think is, frankly, ridiculous.

We see that this motion itself is a recommendation to the Legislature so that in the Legislature, which all members will be able to attend on the first day of that sitting and make these points on the floor of the Chamber – all members will be able to make these points as we debate this proposed motion, if the government actually accepted this, all these points that they're making up around the rights and privileges and immunities of members, Mr. Speaker. I encourage them to perhaps touch up on their *House of Commons*, and perhaps they should touch up on their procedure here because none of these changes we're putting in would significantly infringe any more than any other standing order or practice and procedure that we have in this place. This is a simple requirement that we're expecting every single Albertan to follow, yet government MLAs do not need to be held to the same standard.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Hearing and seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. On the motion as proposed by Member Dang all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Opposed on the phone, please say no.

Member Dang has requested a recorded vote. We will do so here in the room and then go to the phone. I will call each member by name. Please indicate only for or against.

In the room in favour, please say aye.

Mr. Dang: Aye.

The Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Mr. Neudorf: No.

The Chair: On the phones. Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: In favour.

The Chair: Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: In favour.

The Chair: Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: In favour.

The Chair: Member Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: No.

The Chair: Member Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: Opposed.

The Chair: Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Opposed.

The Chair: Member Long.

Mr. Long: Opposed.

The Chair:

That motion is defeated.

Hon. members, we are at item 5, other business. Is there any other business for the meeting today? Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would like to move a motion if that is possible.

The Chair: I believe that there was an additional motion provided for the internal committee website. Provided that that is the motion that you intend on moving, that wouldn't require approval of the majority of the committee. Is that what you intend to move?

Mr. Neudorf: Yes, I believe it is.

The Chair: The hon. member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Again, following the practice, I will read it into the record just to ensure that it is there. Neudorf to move that the Members' Services Committee support the Legislative Assembly Office's administration of the Public Service Commission's policy direction that all Legislative Assembly employees provide proof of vaccination or a negative COVID . . .

The Chair: Sorry. I think that is the previous motion, I believe, that you're reading. Sorry.

Mr. Neudorf: Oh. Sorry. It is requiring the consent of the committee, then. Sorry. I don't believe it was provided.

The Chair: Okay. Why don't you . . .

Mr. Neudorf: Read it slowly? Or do we have to . . .

The Chair: We're going to get consent. If you're hoping to move a motion that was not provided, then – Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I could suggest that the member could distribute it digitally, and we could review it as well and perhaps take a three- or five-minute recess to review before we give consent?

The Chair: Well, you can't give consent based upon the content of the motion.

Mr. Dang: Yeah.

The Chair: You either give consent to move a motion or you don't. Let us go directly to the question. There can be some debate on whether or not consent is granted. That is debatable. Is there anyone wishing to provide comments about that, or shall we move to the question on whether or not a motion should be moved?

To the question. All those in favour of allowing a motion not on notice to be provided to the committee, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone?

An Hon. Member: No.

The Chair: Sorry; just a sec. I'll call by name if that's fine with everyone as my guess is that this will end there anyway.
Member Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Yes.

The Chair: Member Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: Yes.

The Chair: Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Yes.

The Chair: Member Long.

Mr. Long: Yes.

The Chair: Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: No.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: No.

The Chair: Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: No.

The Chair: Okay.
That motion is carried.

Mr. Dang: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been called. Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, this is a request for unanimous consent. It's not a motion, so it should . . .

The Chair: You're wrong. It's by majority of the committee.
Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I'm able to read it slowly for the record.

The Chair: Please. Oh, if yourself or perhaps a member of your team has an electronic copy, if that could be forwarded to the clerk,

the clerk will get that on the screen as quickly as possible so that she's not actually typing your content. But go ahead and read it.

To members of the committee, we will have it circulated via e-mail as soon as possible.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Neudorf to move that the Members' Services Committee support the Legislative Assembly Office's administration of the Public Service Commission's policy direction that all Legislative Assembly employees provide proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction test or a negative rapid COVID-19 test on an ongoing basis to protect the health and safety of all of its employees, the health care system, and Albertans.

The Chair: Members, the motion is available on the screen. I will just get some confirmation that we're having it sent to members of the committee momentarily.

Is there debate? Member Neudorf, why don't you start the debate.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe it's fairly self-explanatory, and it follows the debate from earlier, but basically we just believe this is necessary to support the steps and protection of all Albertans while providing several options for them to do so in a free and democratic way. With that, I look forward to the rest of the debate on this motion.

9:40

The Chair: Are there others? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's pretty disappointing that the government members were unable to submit this at the prescribed time and instead were forced to use their majority to ram through this motion. My understanding, perhaps with your guidance or the clerk's guidance, is that these policies are already in place without a modification to the regulations exemption and variance order. Perhaps I could ask for some guidance there first, and then I'll continue.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Dang. Certainly, as I mentioned in my preamble to the agenda item, my memos of the 8th and the 15th have communicated similar content to the motion, but the Chamber, of course, is the only one that can deliver on that, as I indicated in my remarks. But as I also indicated in my remarks, of course the committee can pass a motion that it sees fit. I believe that's what the debate is here, whether or not the committee wants to pass a motion as presented by Member Neudorf. It's certainly in order, and I am happy to have the debate on the issue.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance. I think that certainly, again, as I said, it's disappointing that government members were unable to submit this ahead of time so that it could be properly reviewed. I think that certainly it is insufficient in terms of that it doesn't actually get rid of the negative test option, and it doesn't address MLAs. It doesn't address the members who are supposed to be the ones leading by example, who are the elected officials in this place, who are the ones who are elected by thousands, in some cases tens of thousands, of their constituents to represent them and to make good decisions on behalf of all Albertans. We see time and time again that this government wasn't even able to do the work properly and get this motion submitted on time, but now they aren't even including members in it.

Mr. Speaker, why is there this double standard for UCP MLAs, for government MLAs? Why is there this double standard for MLAs to not have to meet the same requirements as now they're asking their own staff to? If my constituency assistant or any other staff-person who's even in this place needs to have these requirements,

needs to have these rules in place, why don't I, why doesn't the member sitting opposite me have to have these requirements in place?

Again, we know that the public health agency of Alberta did not recommend the negative PCR test. In fact, based on Member Allard's newsletter, based on her own words, the UCP caucus overruled the public health officials in Alberta and brought in changes that allowed for a degradation in the status of our vaccine passport program.

I think it is absolutely hypocritical and hypocrisy at its worst that this government would be unable to bring the motion forward in the proper manner and then, on top of that, would continue to exempt themselves and continue to put forward this double standard where they do not believe they should live by the same rules as even the people who work in the same offices as them, Mr. Speaker, that even people who are sitting across from them at a board table would not need to have the same rules as them. This is hypocrisy at its worst. It shows that this government is completely out of touch with Albertans and shows that UCP members do not understand the seriousness of this crisis, the seriousness of the pandemic and do not understand that vaccines and showing that vaccines are safe and effective is essential and that UCP members are not serious about ending this pandemic and keeping Alberta open for good.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have Member Goehring. If there are others, please – I see Member Sabir as well. Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just so confused as to why this government continues to put forward recommendations that go against what the public health is recommending. We know that public health is recommending getting vaccinated, showing proof of the vaccination, full stop. Why the UCP continues to put forward amendments from their caucus that go against what the public health recommendations are is just beyond me. It seems to be more of a political statement than an actual safety measure. We know that 85 per cent of Albertans support the vaccine passport. We know that Albertans look to leadership about direction of how to comply with the recommendations. When we have the UCP again continuing to create rules for themselves, to do things that they believe will help themselves, it's just mind boggling. It sends a message that this pandemic isn't serious, that those that have been impacted in devastating ways don't matter. I'm just so concerned that here we are again talking about an exemption for what seems to be a political reason as opposed to what public health is recommending.

I would encourage all members to vote no, be a strong leader in what the public health is recommending, and have us double-vaccinated. Get rid of the testing portion. It's been clear that being double-vaccinated – providing proof of that is essential and what works, and we need to model that to Albertans as leaders in this province. I completely disagree with this motion, and I would encourage all members to vote against it.

The Chair: Members, on the speakers list I have Sabir, Deol, Nixon, Williams. I will alternate caucuses. Member Nixon, followed by Member Sabir, followed by Member Williams, followed by Member Deol.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to address some of the comments about leadership and double standards because it consistently keeps coming up. First of all, I want to emphasize the leadership side of things. I think we've all heard from the Government House Leader in regard to the stance that our caucus has taken and the leadership that's demonstrated by

that. I mean, in addition to that, the numerous pictures of my colleagues on their Facebook posts getting vaccines, even one of my colleagues who created a big billboard. The MLA for Calgary-Edmonton, Prasad Panda, has billboards all over his constituency of that. So I think there is some significant evidence of leadership in that regard. It's been demonstrated through our caucus, and, granted, it's been demonstrated through the NDP caucus as well. So good on that.

In regard to the double standard I have to follow the same procedures as my constituents. When I go to a restaurant, I need to demonstrate proof of vaccine or a negative test as my constituents do, and I support that in regard to reducing transmission and moving forward.

I wanted to emphasize that we need to make sure that we're protecting the privilege of members who don't necessarily agree with us, and at the end of the day that's what this is about. This isn't about creating a double standard for UCP MLAs, but this is about making sure that we're not restricting access for members who don't necessarily agree with us in that regard and that they have every right to walk into that Chamber and be able to represent their constituents and vote on their behalf.

This specific motion is about aligning the recommendations from the CMO and our policy. Anyway, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, clearly, a vaccine passport is not a controversial issue for our caucus. Our leader has said and I will repeat that all 24 of us in the NDP caucus are vaccinated. It's controversial somehow for the UCP caucus even at a time when we know that our hospitals are filled with individual Albertans who are not vaccinated, when even the Premier says that the pandemic, the wave we are seeing is that of unvaccinated Albertans. We also see double standards, and I will quote from, again, Member Allard's letter. She says: "I know that vaccine passports, for example, are incredibly controversial for Albertans who have not been vaccinated. I want you to know that [this] is the reason there is a negative test . . ."

Mr. Neudorf: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.
Member Neudorf.

9:50

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You've already spoken to this. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), again, making allegations against a member. If they're going to just cherry-pick and pick select readings of the newsletter, should they not submit the entire newsletter for the full context of everything? But, again, Member Allard and that newsletter aren't being debated here; it's this motion. I would ask that the member refrain from those kinds of allegations and get back to the task at hand.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that certainly you have provided guidance during this meeting that that was not a point of order, and indeed I would be happy to table that newsletter when we come to the appropriate time and we're back in the Chamber at the first available opportunity, as that is a document that we have been referring to. But I think that in terms of the context with regard to this motion it is important that we have the ability to speak to the Public Service Commission's direction, the policy regarding that, which is included in the text of this motion – right? – and how we

arrived at this motion and the requirements that we're looking to be putting in place in a policy for this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Chair: I would agree that this is a matter of debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just reading the last line. It states, "This was not the recommended option when this policy was first presented to caucus." Also, for the record I can e-mail a copy of this letter to the clerk so we have some reference and the whole context of this letter. Basically, what Member Neudorf is asking us here is to put in place a policy that is not recommended by public health of Alberta. I think having negative tests – there can be many reasons that one can be positive. They still may get tests within those 72 hours, or within the time frame after the test they could get the virus. It's not the safest policy, and that's maybe in part the reason it is not recommended by public health.

I think the question I have for UCP members is: why do they think that we should trust them, that Albertans should trust them on an issue where public health officials of Alberta are saying that that's not the recommended option? That's the question we should be answering, why as members we should be voting for a policy that is not based on science, that is not based on evidence, that is not based on the advice of public health officials of Alberta.

The Chair: Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Chair. It's becoming evident to me that the NDP caucus opposes government policy and the public health recommendations and that they're using this committee as an attempt to try and make political points rather than truly its purpose, which is its responsibility over LAO and over the Members' Services Committee responsibilities, Members' Services orders, communication orders, administrative orders. For that reason, I think it's very important we focus on what's at hand here.

This motion that Member Neudorf is putting forward is consistent with the public health orders, is consistent with what Dr. Hinshaw and the public health experts at the chief medical office are saying. This is something that is reasonable to do. It is beyond incoherent to me why the NDP would put forward the previous motion but vote against this one unless their purpose is not public health and public safety, unless their purpose is simply to pick politics and oppose a government position. Fair enough. I suppose they very well can oppose that, and if they want to, they're welcome to fight in the next election and do so. As for me and our caucus and this committee, let's focus on doing our responsibility and our duty at hand, which is voting on this motion, on its merits, which are good. For that reason, I ask the NDP caucus to please get off its political high horse and vote for the motion reasonably.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Williams.

Sorry. I meant to mention, prior to the previous speaker, to Member Sabir that while I appreciate you sending the letter to the committee clerk, there is no real tabling mechanism. So thank you for e-mailing her; however, it won't create a permanent record.

Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually once again surprised and appalled by the statements and the comments made by Member Williams. It's not the NDP. It's not the NDP caucus members. It seems like it's UCP caucus members – and I'm so sorry to see that – don't seem to agree with public health orders. That's exactly what we are actually demonstrating. What we are looking at, what UCP Member Neudorf has been trying to push through this

committee is, you know, contradicting the public health orders. This is not the message that the Premier and the chief medical officer announced when they go to make public announcements.

You are bringing this proposal while we still have 15,000 active cases in the province and Albertans are struggling, hospitals and health care are under stress – it's almost to the brink of crashing our public health care in Alberta – we have been requesting help from the different provinces, and this is totally not in line with the public health orders made by the chief medical officer, Dr. Deena Hinshaw. It's hard to understand why the UCP members are so adamant to modify and amend these orders just to appease the dissenting views in their own caucus. I will say that it is absolutely damaging and it's costing Albertans, it's costing our business, it's costing our economy.

Basically, what we are saying here is the same thing that the Premier and the chief medical officer announced in public. So why are we trying to create a different set of rules for MLAs when we as elected representatives have actually a responsibility to hold to higher ethical behaviour? In this case we are trying to abdicate from our responsibility, and I once again encourage all members to oppose this motion. This will send a very wrong message, and it will cost Albertans' health, Albertans' lives, and their well-being.

Thank you once again.

The Chair: Are there others? Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Yeah. I was happy to let it go to a vote except for that last comment just, to me, seems outrageous. Am I being gaslit? This is the government policy and the public health recommendation for discretionary activities and for many places of work such as in the public sector. We are mirroring the Public Service Commission's policy. That is what's going on. It is not in contradiction; it is quite literally a mirror of the government's position.

I mean, to me, this is not some reckless activity that is going to cost lives. The NDP caucus wants to have mandatory vaccinations for everyone. That is their position, it seems clear to me. That is not the government's position. There is a negative test option. This has been the position for quite some time now. I will ask the members to please remember to check their e-mails that come in, to look at the news, to understand that this is the position. They can say it all they like in this committee; that doesn't change the fact that this is the exact same position that has been imposed by the public health officer on discretionary activities, that has been imposed by the Public Service Commissioner's policy. So we will leave it there, and I hope we can go into a vote, but I just needed to make it absolutely clear that this is effectively an exact mirror of the government policy and the recommendations of public health orders.

Thank you.

The Chair: Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to speak quite briefly, and then I think we can move on here. Certainly, I think it is ludicrous to suggest that this is a mirroring of the public health orders because, frankly, MLAs continue to be exempt. I think that Mr. Williams does not see the problem in that and speaks miles in terms of what is the intent of the government caucus here and that is to create a double standard, it appears, for themselves compared to the people who both work for them and other Albertans across this province.

10:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, on top of that, we know that, frankly, these were not the public health recommendations that were brought forward by the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Hinshaw, and we know that

because government members have said that in the public, in the news, in the media. So perhaps the member that just spoke should check his own e-mails, should read his own news articles because certainly we know that in those meetings that UCP members were in, they were able to successfully reduce the measures that were recommended by the CMOH. We know that because UCP members have said that publicly.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we look at this motion; we know that it's insufficient. We know that it continues to create a double standard where government members live by a different set of rules than every single other Albertan, and we know that that's extraordinarily disappointing, and Albertans are watching.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question. On the motion as proposed by Member Neudorf, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

I will go to the phones by member name. Member Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Yes.

The Chair: Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Yes.

The Chair: Member Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: Yes.

The Chair: Member Long.

Mr. Long: In favour.

The Chair: Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: No.

The Chair: Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: No.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: No.

The Chair:

The motion is carried and so ordered.

Mr. Dang: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Member Dang has asked for a recorded vote. While it was not asked for in advance and I didn't indicate that it was recorded, for the purposes of this, we have recorded those on the phones, so we can proceed with Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: In favour.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: No.

The Chair:

The motion is carried, with a recorded vote, 5-4.

The records will indicate as such.

We are at other business. Is there any other business that would like to be discussed today?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, if I may.

The Chair: Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Well, Chair, I'd like to bring forward a motion to add the Deputy Government House Leader remuneration to member allowance orders and to close a loophole to prevent double-dipping. Would you like me to read the motion? I believe it has been provided in advance to the committee for the section of other business.

The Chair: Yes. While the motion itself wasn't part of the agenda, this motion was submitted to the committee prior and was available on the internal committee website. If you can, Member Williams, read that into the record just as soon as we have it on the screen.

Mr. Williams: You let me know when that is, Chair.

The Chair: I will do so.

Please proceed, Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: Thank you. I move that

the Members' Services Committee amend section 3 of the members' allowances order as follows: (a) in subsection (2), one, by striking out "There shall be" and substituting "Subject to subsections (3) to (5) there shall be" and, two, by adding the following immediately after clause (c):

(i) \$12,096 a year in the case of the Deputy Government House Leader;

and (b) by adding the following immediately after subsection (2):

(3) If more than one Member holds the position of Deputy Government House Leader, only one of those Members is entitled to the additional allowance prescribed to that position under subsection (2).

(4) A Member who holds the position referred to in subsection (2) is not entitled to be paid the additional allowance prescribed to that position if the Member receives a salary in accordance with section 1 of the Executive Council Salaries Order.

(5) A Member who concurrently holds more than one position referred to in subsection (2) is entitled to only one of the additional allowances prescribed for those positions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Williams. Do you have any additional comments?

Mr. Williams: Yeah. The rationale is quite straightforward. I believe all the members have seen this. Members carrying out the duty of the Deputy Government House Leader should reasonably be entitled and fairly compensated for their work, something that was not previously in the orders. It's different from the work of a minister if the individual does not hold that position. If the minister holds the position of Deputy Government House Leader, they can only claim one of the two. We're really removing the ability for individuals to claim two different remunerations in this section.

For example, I think in many ways for this current situation we're cost neutral. Our current government whip is not claiming that government whip salary because that same individual is also an associate minister, claiming that in section 1. I think that we've paired this parallel to the same as the government whip's salary in terms of a dollar amount, and it is a reasonable amount of work that's done. These individuals working in Executive Council or in leadership positions in caucus do do a lot of work, especially on the government side, when it comes to the Government House Leader with aggressive agendas of legislation, so it's important that we compensate them for the work that they do.

With that, I'll turn it over to you, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wow. Just wow. If you're talking about out of touch with Albertans, if you're talking about a situation where we are currently in the middle of a global pandemic, where we're currently in the middle of an Alberta health crisis, where just last week over two days 68 people were reported dead in this province, to come in here and actually suggest that UCP MLAs should receive basically a 10 per cent raise, a \$12,000 raise, in the middle of this pandemic, to pat themselves on the back and pat the UCP MLA's back and say, "Great job; here's a raise," in the middle of a pandemic when we should be focused on fighting the COVID-19 crisis, when we should be focused on ensuring that Albertans are safe and Albertans are vaccinated and Albertans are at home – instead, UCP members and Mr. Williams' motion here seems to be focused on rewarding his friends.

Mr. Speaker, that's simply the height of hypocrisy, to go after health care workers, to lay off thousands of educational assistants, to lay off health care workers, to go after wages on provincial service workers, to go after wages on health care workers, to go after wages on nurses, to attack doctors all throughout a public health emergency, and then a 10 per cent raise for the UCP MLAs, a 10 per cent raise for the Deputy Government House Leader. That is simply outrageous.

Health care workers do a lot of work, too. In fact, many of them are working overtime. They're working in ICUs when they haven't received training for that in over a decade in some cases, Mr. Speaker. We know health care workers are at the brink right now. They're overworked, and instead of offering them raises, instead of working with the health care heroes, what we're seeing is the UCP going after them and saying they need to take wage rollbacks, they need to be laid off, they need to be less compensated for their work, but UCP MLAs, well, they should get a 10 per cent raise, they should get a \$12,000 raise.

Mr. Speaker, it simply doesn't make any sense. In the middle of a pandemic they denied \$30 raises to AISH recipients, yet the UCP deputy House leader will get a \$12,000 raise. When we're talking about how much work people do, when we're talking about the level of hypocrisy in this province, when we're talking about who deserves to be rewarded and who deserves to have our support right now, I think it should be the hard-working front-line workers in this province. I think it should be the people fighting this pandemic every single day. I think it should be Albertans who are trying to make the best of what they've got and not UCP MLAs getting \$12,000 raises.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't make any sense that we would make this hypocritical change when this government and this government member who is in the government caucus continues to attack health care workers, continues to attack and request wage rollbacks.

10:10

The Chair: I might just interject here, Member Dang. I could have misheard you, but it sounded to me like you said that this member continues to attack health care workers. My guess is that that isn't the case. That is unparliamentary, and I ask that you apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I withdraw. I clearly meant to say that this member's caucus continues and this government caucus continues to attack health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at these changes that are being brought in place, when we look at the direction this government is

bringing to the province, when we look at the direction the government is bringing to the fiscal situation of this province, this is supposed to be a fiscally conservative government. This is supposed to be a fiscal government that is trying to get our spending in line, and instead what they're doing is that on the back of health care workers, on the back of public servants this government continues to attack the people who are keeping this province running during a pandemic and then rewards their own insiders, rewards their own friends, and gives a \$12,000 raise, a massive raise, to their own MLAs instead of to those people who are on the front lines of this pandemic. If there is anything more hypocritical, I haven't seen it yet.

We were supposed to be here talking about vaccine mandates and ensuring the public servants that work in this place and in our offices were safe today. We were supposed to be talking about making sure MLAs would be vaccinated and safe. Instead, what we're talking about now is giving \$12,000 additional dollars to a UCP MLA. What we're talking about is giving \$12,000, a 10 per cent raise, something unheard of, basically, outside of this building, Mr. Speaker, to UCP MLAs because they think they need to pat themselves on the back in the middle of this fourth wave, when just last week in two days over 60 people were reported dead in this province. I think it's simply ludicrous, and I would be happy to hear additional comments.

The Chair: I have Member Williams. If there are others, please indicate to the clerk.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Chair. The truth is that this position is a new position in that normally in the past it's been held by a government minister, so the compensation for that work was taken care of already in section 1. The fact that we now have a different situation, to be fair, that is also cost neutral within our government is reasonable to compensate the individual for the work that he'll be doing. This is not a raise. Someone is not getting more money because we thought that they'd done good work. Someone is getting compensated for the work that they're doing, and it's true of all the members of the Legislature and Executive Council that they ought to be compensated fairly for the work they do.

I will remind everyone that our entire Legislature took a 5 per cent reduction in salary almost immediately upon taking office, a 10 per cent reduction for the Premier. This wage reflects that 5 per cent reduction in terms of paralleling with the government whip. I think it's important that we understand that this isn't about grandstanding politics. This is about compensating folks for the work that they are doing, and he will obviously want to be able to continue doing that work in the Legislature.

On that light, I'll turn it over to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: All right. Hon. members, I have independent Member Loewen. Then, also, I have Member Deol and Member Goehring. I think we will go to Member Loewen, followed by Member Deol.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Appreciate that. I've been trying to think of words to describe this, and so far I'm at tone deaf, out of touch, unimaginable, absurd, hypocritical. Here we have a government in the middle of a health crisis, and the Premier's first thought, obviously, is trying to figure out how he can line the pockets of his own people to the tune of \$12,000 a year. We have Albertans suffering, losing their jobs, losing their businesses, losing their homes in all this chaos that's going on right now, and this government, the best thing they can come up with in a meeting like this, a committee meeting like this, is to give one of their members an enormous raise that has never been done in the past.

This position has never paid this in the past. This is a \$12,000 raise. This is just taking care of your own people, and I actually think it's disgusting. I can't believe that this government would do this, and I think everybody should vote no. Obviously, I'm not on the committee – I don't have a vote – but I would insist that everybody vote no to this motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I remember attending my very first meeting, even before the very first meeting, and the government's message to Albertans of fiscal reckoning, and then right after the reconvening of our very first meeting of the Members' Services Committee, chaired by you, when the government asked us to take the rollback. We said it then, "We don't have a problem to, you know, participate by doing another roll, but this should not be used as a precedent to attack ordinary Albertans and Alberta workers," and that is exactly what the UCP government has done after actually using that move as a symbol to Albertans.

The UCP government went to roll back youth wages, and they rolled back the Occupational Health and Safety Act. They made changes to how Alberta workers would be affected by their overtime hours, and not only this; they went after doctors. There was no funding for an education system that was promised before by the UC Party during the campaign. Not only that; even in the middle of the pandemic – it was so rich – the UCP minister actually let go about 25,000 education staff, and the government consistently kept giving the warning to 11,000 health care workers as well.

On one side this is the message, and that is the pattern. The UCP government has been creating the narrative for Albertans to do more for less. During that time they attacked those vulnerable people, the people on AISH. They are big sections of society. You can go on and on. The list is pretty long.

Now in the middle of this pandemic, when Alberta is unprecedentedly affected by the COVID virus and Albertans are doing whatever they can do to help and follow the government and the Alberta health orders to contain the virus, to get back to normal life, in the middle of this – I don't know where this made sense, that the UCP government came up with the idea. When they're asking each and every Albertan to do more with less and accept less wages and denied the democratic rights of the workers of the sections of our province to sit with them and negotiate their terms, all of a sudden they're asking this one specific question to give unprecedentedly to their caucus member. I think this is totally unacceptable, and we need to oppose this move. I will encourage all, actually, committee members that can vote in this committee to vote against this move. This is not only my view; I think this is our moral duty not to move on this path in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chair: Member Goehring, please.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I'm just so disgusted that this is what we're talking about right now while we know that there are so many Albertans that are struggling and can't afford their mortgage, they're losing their businesses. We should be talking about ways that we can continue to support Albertans to get through this pandemic, this financial instability that's happening all across the province. This week is Alberta's Small Business Week, and instead of talking about, you know, perhaps introducing rent or eviction protection for commercial businesses, we're talking about giving a raise to a UCP member.

10:20

It blows my mind that this is where we're at. It is so out of touch. It is so tone deaf. I know Albertans are reaching out to government to express these concerns. I also know that they're not getting a response. They're not being listened to. If this government was listening to Albertans, they would not be putting forward a raise to one of their members, knowing the devastating impacts that COVID has had on so many across this province. It is entitled, and I am just absolutely embarrassed that this is something that we're talking about this morning. I would encourage all members to vote no to giving the UCP member a raise. Absolutely unacceptable.

The Chair: Member Barnes, followed by Member Sabir.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, feel that this is so tone deaf that it is a moral issue. Let's keep in mind, colleagues, that all 87 of us will be painted with the same brush for increasing – increasing – a deputy's pay substantially, as so many members in front of me spoke so clearly, at a time that public services are taxed, you know, to the end, the fact that private employees have had to take on so much debt, have had to pay so many high increases in utilities and insurance, and so many of them have lost their jobs, at a time we're all so concerned about the health and the welfare of our families, our neighbours, and our communities. All 87 of us are going to be painted with how tone deaf, again, this government is, the same government that ran a \$17 billion deficit last year, the same government that brags about this big majority they got.

Oh, no. Heaven forbid, the government before us was going to put us \$100 billion in debt. Well, my goodness, the UCP has blown way past that. So your timing, your understanding of where the average Albertan family and community are at, especially in rural Alberta, is so off. A deputy House leader – maybe it's fair to suggest that the House leader, if the House leader can't accommodate things, should maybe share some of his pay or her pay.

Secondly, we all know in the Legislature how many of us are willing to stand up and help when called upon. You know, this situation for the last 20 months has been taxing on all of us, so there's all kinds of help that we'd gladly stand up and help and volunteer for at a time that 4.4 million Albertans are feeling the stress.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for letting me speak. To all the voting colleagues on this committee: I would ask that you vote against this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be speaking against this. Also, like everybody else, I'm very surprised to see this motion at this time when Albertans want their government to be singularly focused on managing this pandemic. What we see here is that the UCP government is trying to manage its own caucus. Out of 24 or 25 ministers they couldn't find anybody to be deputy and take on these responsibilities within what they are already getting paid, and now they're creating a huge increase, a \$12,000 increase, a 10 per cent increase for one of their members.

When this government was caught vacationing overseas in December, when they were caught dining on the sky palace, I think at that time they promised that they will be somewhat humble, they will learn some lessons, and they will be focused on Albertans, not themselves. But time and again what we will see from this government is that they are singularly focused on themselves and managing their own caucus by giving them raises, by making new positions, accommodating them, and I don't think that's what Albertans expect and deserve. We should all be voting against this.

It's completely unnecessary. It's not needed. It's a waste of public funds. Public funds should not be used like this at a time when we are asking the public service to tighten their belts, when we are asking people on disability to take a \$30 cut because government cannot pay that. We are firing teachers. We are firing, like, people from the public service. They're reducing the public service by 7 per cent, and here what we see is a raise for one of their own. I think this needs to stop. This hypocrisy needs to stop.

The Chair: Are there others? If there are none, I am prepared – oh. Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that, well, it's an interesting day when I'm agreeing with my independent colleagues here. "Disgusting" is perhaps one of the best words I've heard yet today about how to describe this. We know that if Albertans get sick, whether that's with COVID-19 or any other illness, they don't have job-protected paid sick leave right now because this government refused to bring that in. Small-business owners who right now may not be able to pay the rent do not have commercial eviction bans. We've seen this government time and time again do nothing during this pandemic, but today they have \$12,000, a 10 per cent raise, a double-digit percentage-wise raise, to give to a UCP insider, to a UCP MLA, to their friend, yet we have Albertans struggling every single day. It simply doesn't make any sense.

How many people – I know that nobody in my constituency e-mailed me or called me or talked to me at the door and said: "You know what? UCP MLAs need a raise right now." That's not the number one issue I'm getting in my inbox. I hope that perhaps if UCP MLAs are hearing about this, perhaps in Peace River or Lethbridge or anywhere else, they could inform this committee. They could inform the place that they are receiving correspondence that UCP MLAs deserve a raise, UCP MLAs are doing so great, and they should be patting themselves on the back. Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that I'm receiving many, many correspondences to the opposite of that, where people don't believe this government is fit to govern, is fit to be in this place at all.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, what we see is an out-of-touch motion, an absurd motion – if it wasn't in black and white in front of us, I wouldn't even believe that it had been proposed at all – that we should be bringing forward a raise for government UCP members, for people who right now don't even have a grip on the reality of what is happening outside these walls, that don't have a grip on the reality of what is affecting everyday Albertans who are focused on trying to make ends meet yet give themselves 10 per cent, \$12,000, raises, give their friends \$12,000 raises. That's hypocrisy at its finest. It simply doesn't make any sense. Again, when every single person who has spoken to this other than the mover of the motion – and, Mr. Speaker, somebody will correct me if I'm wrong, of course – has spoken against it, I think it could not be more clear.

It could not be more clear when there is unanimity between independent members and the NDP opposition. That doesn't happen that often, Mr. Speaker, but today – today – we are standing together against this recklessness, this irresponsibility, this hypocrisy, this absurdism that is coming forward from UCP members, who believe that they should live by a different set of rules, who believe that they deserve more, that they deserve better than everybody else. That is personified and exemplified in this \$12,000 raise for a UCP MLA that they are not giving to a single health care worker, that they are not giving to a single small business, that they are not giving to anybody who is struggling with food insecurity right now, who's struggling with any of the problems that this government has failed to act on throughout the

COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, we're here talking about: should we give UCP MLAs more money because they're doing a good job?

Mr. Speaker, I think that's absolutely ridiculous. I think it's something that every single member should vote against. Indeed, if so many UCP MLAs are going to remain silent on this, then we'll have to see how they vote because this doesn't make any sense, and I'm sure they will receive correspondence about this.

Thank you.

10:30

The Chair: I see a hand up. No? Are there others? Oh, sorry. Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did raise a hand. We have talked about it. I was just wondering, like, if any member from the UCP caucus would want to share with us if they have been talked to by their constituents in West Yellowhead, Highwood, Lethbridge-East, Peace River about this raise. Have they asked any of their constituents, and what will their constituents think about this raise?

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question.

Mr. Dang: A recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Member Dang has asked for a recorded vote. I will do that through the room and then call individually to each member on the phone. Please indicate in favour of the motion or against the motion.

Member Williams.

Mr. Williams: In favour.

The Chair: Member Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: In favour.

The Chair: Member Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: In favour.

The Chair: Member Long.

Mr. Long: In favour.

The Chair: Member Deol.

Mr. Deol: Against.

The Chair: Member Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Against.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Against.

The Chair: Member Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: In favour.

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Against.

The Chair:

That motion is carried five votes to four.

We are at other business. Is there any other business that has not been yet raised?

Seeing none, the date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair, and that will likely be for the purposes of the budget parameters guide or the budget parameters meeting.

Motion to adjourn? Member Neudorf. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:32 a.m.]

