



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Tuesday, December 14, 2021
9:30 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-2-6

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Chair
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC), Deputy Chair

Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
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)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)*
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)

* substitution for Nathan Neudorf

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>

9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, members. Welcome. I'm glad to be able to see all of you this morning and that you were all able to make it in today, for those of you who have joined us in person. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

My name is Nathan Cooper. I'm the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I will now ask members and those joining us at the committee table to introduce themselves for the record, beginning with the clerk. Then I will call upon members who are joining us remotely to introduce themselves.

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

Mr. Schow: Good morning. Joseph Schow, MLA, Cardston-Siksika.

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Joy: Good morning. Darren Joy, senior financial officer.

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

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk.

The Chair: Joining us remotely, Mr. Deol? Mr. Sigurdson? If you guys are there, please introduce yourselves both for the record as well as to make sure that we have everything working back and forth. Ms Goehring? I don't want to assume anything, but it would seem that there are some technical issues. Other than Ms Goehring, who else is joining us? Ms Rosin? Let me see if . . .

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, I believe our members are in a waiting room of some sort, so they might be in the wrong meeting. Let me see if I can figure this out.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Allard: We can hear you now finally.

The Chair: Excellent. Well, for those of you who have just joined us, we have already gone around the table and introduced ourselves. We were just at the point in the meeting where we were turning to members joining us remotely. What I'd like to do is that I'll call you by name, and then if you can introduce yourself for the record, that would be exceptional.

MLA Williams.

Mr. Williams: MLA Williams, the Member for Peace River. If it's all right, I'll pop on and off video where reception allows. I just seem to be in bad reception.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent.
Member Deol.

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

The Chair: Member Goehring.

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

The Chair: Member Sigurdson.

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

The Chair: That's a very nice Christmas tree, sir.
Member Allard.

Mrs. Allard: Good morning. Tracy Allard, Member for Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Member Rosin.

Ms Rosin: Good morning. Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

The Chair: I'd also like to note for the record the following substitution: Member Rosin for Member Neudorf.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. I would like to remind everyone of the current committee room protocols, which require that those attending the meeting in person must wear a mask at all times unless they are speaking and that all attendees please maintain appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, so members do not need to turn them on and off. Committee members, these proceedings are being streamed live on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. All videoconferencing participants are asked to ensure that their cameras are on when speaking. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

With that, we'll move to the approval of the agenda. Would a member wish to move a motion? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for your information or for the committee's information, at the point of other business I intend to move an additional motion, that was provided in advance. Does that need to be amended, or is that okay?

The Chair: No, it doesn't need to be amended, but we will likely need to seek consent of the committee to move additional motions. Just for clarity's sake, is that in addition to the motion that's already been moved or some changes to that?

Mr. Dang: Sorry. I guess not in addition to a motion right now, but certainly at the point of other business I'd like to make the motion.

The Chair: Okay. We'll deal with it at that time.

We'll take a motion to approve the agenda. Member Schow.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. So moved.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? All in favour of the motion in the room, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. Remotely, in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered.

We'll now move to agenda item 3, the approval of the minutes. Are there any amendments to the minutes from our last committee meeting of October 18, 2021?

If not, would a member wish to move the adoption of the minutes? Member Long. Any other discussion? The question on the approval of the minutes: all those in favour in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, any opposed? The motion is carried and so ordered.

9:40

Excellent. I'd like to move now to point 4, parameters for the LAO budget estimates. I'd like to introduce our next item, the budget parameters for the Legislative Assembly Office, by providing the committee with an overview of the Legislative Assembly Office budget. After this, I'm happy to open the floor for further discussion.

By way of background, using the current fiscal year's numbers, the LAO budget is approximately \$66 million and is comprised of three main components: the LAO branch budget, approximately \$24 million; MLA administration, approximately \$33 million; and the caucus budgets, which allocate for approximately \$8 million.

I have given the LAO administration some preliminary direction to plan for no increase to the LAO branch budgets, including the budget for the Office of the Speaker, with the exception of five new requirements, all of which are noted in the budget parameters document that was provided to you in advance of the meeting. The new requirements are as follows: \$200,000 in parliamentary services arising from resources required in Parliamentary Counsel and House services to support the forecasted sessional hours and the committee requirements as well as the costs associated with providing support of American sign language interpretation for the daily Routine.

I might just note and I will share with the committee a document of projected sessional hours. From 2018-2019 and moving forward in the four subsequent years, the Legislative Assembly sat 292 hours, 453 hours, 560 hours, and we are on pace to sit 608 hours in this fiscal year. I'll be happy to provide this chart to the committee members following that, but that makes up the majority of the additional costs in the parliamentary services budget: \$175,000 in LAO committee support for two additional committees to undertake statutory reviews of the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Personal Information Protection Act; the Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights; support for ASL interpretation for committees; and now the additional committee on safe supply.

The \$1.6 million for information technology and broadcast: this bullet point was discussed at last year's budget parameters meeting and in the budget estimates meeting. This is to replace obsolete equipment, upgrade IT networks, and cover increased costs of mandatory user licensing. The \$1.1 million in one-time funding for fiscal 2022-23 as outlined in last year's budget parameters: this is the enterprise resource planning, or ERP, system. On this particular point, we have seen significant savings in the overall number that we did talk about last year, which has been a real positive for the overall budget even though it is still a significant amount. The \$250,000 one-time funding for the 2022-23 budget to prepare for transition to the 31st Legislature: this amount is standard as we move into each subsequent election year. That number will also increase as we move towards the following year, which will include an election.

In summary, LAO branches continue to reflect a hold-the-line budget for the continuation of the existing operations in 2022-23 with the exception of the previously mentioned adjustments. The proposed budget parameters do not include any direction on the two other elements of the LAO budget – namely, MLA administration and caucus budgets – and I'll look for committee direction in that regard.

I will make one other comment prior to opening the floor for discussion, and that is that I noticed a government announcement yesterday with respect to some changes in negotiations that they undertook with the public service. That includes a 1.25 per cent salary increase effective January 1 and a minimum of a 1.5 per cent salary increase with the potential of an additional .05 increase based on economic factors on September 1, 2023. This will have some impact on the LAO budget. It will only be one quarter of next year, but at our budget estimates meeting the LAO will have additional information on the actual impacts. We will need to make some additional decisions around that, and that, of course, is only based upon whether or not the GOA makes any comments about opted out, management, or other employee groups, which is what the LAO employee groups fall into.

With that, I'll open the table for discussion. Are there any comments? Member Schow.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for going through those line items so eloquently. I think this is a great time for me to take a moment and express my gratitude to the LAO and all staff there for their tireless work.

You pointed out that as a Legislature we sit more than, I think, any other Legislature has in the past, and we, of course, are here on behalf of the people. It's an important calling that we have and a responsibility, but it couldn't be done without the help of those who do work for the Legislative Assembly Office. I see no issue with the numbers you've outlined here in making sure that they have the resources required to carry out their duties.

As such, if there's a motion or a draft motion to adopt the outlined line items that you have put forward here in the table, I'd be happy to see a draft motion. And if it's in the spirit of what we're trying to accomplish here, I'd be happy to put my name to it.

The Chair: Excellent. The draft motion will read: moved by Member Schow that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2022-23 budget parameters as distributed for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, presented to the committee at the December 14, 2021, meeting, and direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare the 2022-23 budget estimates according to these parameters.

Is there any other discussion? Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a couple of questions here, and I think I'll try to keep them very brief. It's largely regarding some of the upgrades and funding for the IT support systems and so on.

First off, before I get into that question, I want to thank the LAO and your team, Mr. Speaker, for the amazing work done on this budget. I mean, I know it's a considerable amount of work required, and I'm very pleased to see that overall the asks, I think, are extremely reasonable and aligned with the goals of this organization.

I guess specifically around the IT infrastructure I've noted that there's, I think, a relatively modest increase for things that are reasonable overall such as the server upgrades and so on. But, I guess, one of the questions I have is: we're seeing an increase in the prevalence of cybersecurity risks, and certainly just in the last two or three days here we've seen perhaps the largest cybersecurity incident ever, unfortunately. I mean, I think the security people and the computer people here would know what I'm talking about if nobody else will. But I anticipate that this will continue to increase in severity and in risk and in cost, and I'm wondering if there are any projected increases to mitigate that in the future and what the planning for that looks like.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Dang. I'm happy to have Ruth speak to this particular point.

Ms McHugh: Yeah, you bet. Thank you. I'm so glad that you brought that up because that is absolutely top of mind for us. One of the items that Mr. Speaker talked about was to provide the staff resources to maintain and secure the LAO's critical IT security and infrastructure. We actually called that out, Member Dang, in the budget parameters. It's very, very important to us, and we absolutely have to act on it. So not only within our current infrastructure and the upgrades in infrastructure that we're planning to do, but I think you probably know that the most vulnerable portal into an organization's infrastructure is through its people.

So we have a cyberawareness program that we've had tremendous uptake on from all of our employees, and we're hoping to roll that out in the new year to members and their constituency staff and caucuses. We really appreciate your support in ensuring that your employees and yourselves actually take the cybersecurity training. It's top-notch, and it's already worked.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, I think you can attest to a couple of recent incidents where there were some targeted spear phishing attacks, where people did a pretty good job of imitating top LAO stakeholders, if you will, and our people caught it and were able to avoid a disaster. So, yes, it is top of mind, and it's very much within this budget that we're asking for. Thank you for bringing it up.

The Chair: Are there other questions, Member Dang?

Mr. Dang: I'm okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? On the phones?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question. Hon. members, on the motion proposed by Member Schow, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed in the room, please say no. On the phone, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed on the phone, please say no.

Motion is carried and so ordered.

Okay. To other business, the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has proposed a motion – correction: Member Dang on his behalf. The motion reads as follows: Member Dang moved that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve a one-time addition of \$25,000 to the member's services allowance of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to update signage, gift and promotional items, communication and stationery materials to reflect the updated constituency name.

Member Dang, would you like to speak to this motion prior to our discussion?

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I think that there is some effort that has been done behind the scenes here, and I'm happy to – do I need to amend the motion later, or can I move it differently?

The Chair: Well, why don't we just have a bit of discussion because I have a little bit of comment to make on this. Then maybe we can get a motion that more accurately reflects everyone's goals here because I think we have a lot of aligned goals. So why don't you speak to it briefly and the things that you might be willing to amend, and then I'll make some comments, and then perhaps you can move it.

Mr. Dang: Sure. Thank you. I don't have too much to say. I think perhaps my colleague here from Calgary-McCall, soon to be Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, will have some comments to make as well, but certainly I think that it's important that we recognize that

this is a historic change to a constituency. Perhaps I'll pass it over to my colleague if he has something to say.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member Dang. I think the motion is somewhat self-explanatory. Due to the name change, I will have to change the name, like, on signage in the office. I'll have to change those stamps. I'll have to change constituency banners, that standing thing, and many promotional materials, communication materials. That's why I asked for this additional money.

I want to, at the appropriate time, make an amendment to it to say: an addition of up to \$25,000. The reason for that is that I don't have the exact accounting of what it will cost. If we do that, up to \$25,000, and keep this somewhat in a separate account so I can account for it separately on an actual-cost basis, then whatever it will cost, I can bill it separately to this account.

The Chair: Okay. I wouldn't want to speak for the will of the committee. I know that Member Schow and I had a conversation previously about this. I wouldn't necessarily want to provide comment on whether or not I think this is a good idea or a bad idea although I have no major concern about the fact that there are very real costs for you and this was a real change. My only reservation or concern is around: on a one-time basis actually making changes to MSA budgets. It becomes convoluted and a bit challenging to, like, transfer you in money, transfer it out when the LAO has the capability and other budget allowances like, for example, MLA administration, which often returns resources to the treasury, or unspent budget allotments because not all entitlements are used.

So my recommendation – and I've had a discussion with the Clerk and others – is that instead of actually making a transfer to your MSA, we administer this out of MLA administration. We still move the motion that says "up to \$25,000" for the items identified in your motion, but that we'll just say or change it to: to be paid for through MLA administration or other. That allows the LAO a little bit of flexibility based upon it. So we arrive at the same thing, but it's going to be much less complicated for everyone, and it will be paid on receipts as if it was coming from your MSA.

Member Schow.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. I'll just go on the record here. I think that this motion, in spirit I have no problem with, I support. I was happy to vote in favour of the bill that changed the name of the constituency to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall from Calgary-McCall, and the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has been very gracious about the new name as well.

In terms of what the member is trying to do, on this side of the table – and I don't want to speak for my colleagues and the UCP caucus – I have no problem with the spirit of it though I wouldn't know the best way to navigate this, so I appreciate your guidance on that. But for the record if there is a motion that would help that member opposite change letterhead, signage, business cards, et cetera, et cetera, I'd be happy to support that, just so long as it's the easiest way to get him the resources needed without putting the LAO in a difficult spot.

The Chair: I think we do need approval from the committee to amend the motion because there was no other motion submitted. I can't remember the actual question, but why don't I go ahead and ask for the committee's consent to make amendments to this motion. All those in favour of allowing amendments to this motion in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

Mr. Schow: My understand would be that if we have a draft motion, we would vote on whether or not we are going to allow that draft motion and then – no? That's not how it was done in the past; we just allow general motions?

The Chair: Well, I think we're covered one way or the other. I appreciate that.

Member Sabir, are you comfortable with something along the lines of: that the Members' Services Committee provide reimbursement of up to \$25,000 for the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to update signage, gifts, promotional items, stationery to reflect the updated constituency office?

Do we need to have any direction on where it's coming from, MLA administration or other?

Ms Dean: It's already indicated, so it's fine.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Dean: Just one addition is that it's upon submission of receipts.

The Chair: Oh, upon submission of receipts. Maybe if we can include that, and then that way they are targeted to these things. Are you good with that, Member Sabir?

Mr. Sabir: I have another thing. Like, I only mentioned signage, gifts, and promotional items, but can we say "anything to reflect the new name change," so that if there's anything that comes up that I didn't catch in this one, it's covered?

The Chair: Yeah. I think that's fine.

Mr. Sabir: Then that's fine.

The Chair: Okay.

Any other additional questions, comments, concerns?

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess, if I'm reading this right, is it that the MSA will be reimbursed from the MLA administration budget?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Dang: That's right. There's an update coming that says that.

10:00

The Chair: Essentially, what will happen is that Member Sabir will submit receipts to his FMAS assistant as if it was an MSA expense, but the LAO will just pay it out of MLA administration. There's actually going to be no transfer. The good thing about this, amongst it being the least bureaucratic: it also won't reflect, in Member Sabir's annual budgeting, \$25,000 more than every other constituency. Making one-time adjustments to MSAs I am leery of as a sort of precedent-setting model.

We'll just get the final wording, committee members, on this motion, and then we'll call the question. Are there any other comments on the motion as we wait for the final wording?

Okay. Here is the final wording. Moved by Member Dang that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve reimbursement of up to \$25,000 from MLA administration upon submission of receipts for the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to update signage, gifts, and promotional items and communication stationery, materials, and other items to reflect the updated constituency name.

Last chance for questions, comments.

Mr. Long: So "upon submission of receipts." Do you want to include "and approval of"?

The Chair: It's implied.

Mr. Long: It is? Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All those in favour of the motion as proposed by Member Dang in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones or online in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

That moves us to the conclusion of our meeting. I have two quick comments to make prior to that. I mentioned earlier that I would distribute for the committee's sake the 10-year average of sitting hours, being 319 hours. This year we're projected to sit 608. There's also some other information about days that we sat, sittings past midnight, and that sort of thing for members' consideration as they go about their business in the Assembly.

I also will circulate a document that I think is quite interesting with respect to the hours and the sitting. It includes the total legislation that has been passed by the Assembly during that time. I think members might find the correlation quite interesting, and I encourage you to review that and take that into your planning considerations as you report back the important work of Members' Services to your respective caucuses.

The other comment that I would just like to make is that the next meeting will be the budget estimates meeting, barring any need for a Members' Services Committee meeting between the two. I am proposing that we meet on January 26 at 9 a.m. If your respective caucuses can just double-check their agendas that there are no significant caucus activities happening that day and get back to me, I will send out a meeting notice prior to Christmas with respect to that date. Consider this your warning to go ahead and get that done.

Are there any other items?

Hearing and seeing none, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly Office, thank you all for being here. I hope you have a happy, healthy, holiday Christmas season. If you're travelling around today, please make sure you do so safely. To the Legislative Assembly Office, on behalf of all members of this committee and members of the Assembly I thank you for your work not only today but each and every day and the work that you do defending freedom, democracy, and justice for all. Thank you all so much.

Motion to adjourn? Member Schow. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

The committee stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:06 a.m.]

