



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, January 29, 2024
9 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Chair
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC), Deputy Chair

Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)

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9 a.m. Monday, January 29, 2024

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this committee meeting to order.

My name is Nathan Cooper. I'm the MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the chair of this committee. Now I'd like to ask the members who are joining us at the committee table to introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call on members who are joining us remotely. If you are at the table this morning, whether you're a member of the committee or supporting the committee, if you can introduce yourself as it comes around, beginning with the committee clerk.

Mr. Roth: Good morning, everyone. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Getson: Shane Getson, MLA, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Dr. Ludwick: Dave Ludwick, executive director, corporate services, LAO.

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

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. I'm Dave Eggen, MLA for Edmonton-North West.

Ms Gray: Good morning, everyone. Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Koenig: Trafton Koenig with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Clerk.

The Chair: Now those joining us remotely. Mr. Singh.

Mr. Singh: Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

The Chair: Mr. Sabir.

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

The Chair: Ms Phillips.

Ms Phillips: Shannon Phillips, MLA for Lethbridge-West.

The Chair: Mr. Rowswell.

Mr. Rowswell: Hi. MLA Garth Rowswell for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

The Chair: Mr. Long.

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

The Chair: Have I missed anyone? Excellent. Thank you.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. Please note that microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of this meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating remotely are encouraged to please turn off your camera except for when you are speaking and to mute your microphone when you're not speaking as well. Members participating virtually who wish to be placed on the

speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk. Members in the room, please indicate your desire to speak by signalling to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

With that, it brings us to item 2 of our agenda, the approval of the agenda. Is there anyone wishing to move the motion to approve the agenda? Ms Gray. Ms Gray moves that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed agenda. Are there any questions, comments, concerns, or discussion? Seeing none, all in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

That brings us to item 3, the approval of the meeting minutes. Are there any amendments to the minutes from our last committee meeting? If not, would someone be willing to propose the approval motion? Mr. Getson. Any discussion, questions, comments, concerns on the motion? All in favour of the approval of the minutes, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Any opposed? The motion is carried.

That brings us to item 4, the report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee. Hon. members, the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee has provided an interim report to the committee in accordance with the motion of the committee passed on November 9, 2023, which established the terms of reference for the subcommittee. The report was circulated to committee members on Friday, January 26, 2024. The subcommittee is requesting an extension of time to complete its work, including extending the engagement of Ms Cheryl Scarlett, the independent consultant retained by the Legislative Assembly Office as part of the subcommittee review of members' compensation, benefits, and allowances.

I would like to open the floor to comments, questions, and motions in relation to the subcommittee report. If there aren't significant comments, questions, or concerns, there can be a motion made. It would go something like this: that

the Standing Committee on Members' Services (a) receive the interim report from the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee and (b) that the subcommittee recommend to extend the deadline by which the subcommittee must submit its advice and recommendations to the committee from January 31, 2024, to September 30, 2024, and to continue the engagement of the independent consultant for the duration of the committee's review of compensation, benefits, and allowances.

Are there any questions, comments, concerns, or is anyone prepared to move such a motion?

Mr. Getson: I'd be prepared. I think you read my mind, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions, comments, concerns on the motion? Anyone remotely?

All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. All opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, I would just like to make a brief comment that as the committee has extended the time frame for the subcommittee to do its work until the end of September, there are a number of decisions of the committee that will remain pending for us to consider at our next meeting such as that the Legislative Assembly Office will include a contingency in the 2024-2025 budget estimates to account for any possible future decisions of the subcommittee and the committee based on the advice and recommendations that the subcommittee may take.

That brings us to point 5, the proposed amendments to the Members' Services orders, or the committee orders. Members, as you are aware, on April 1, 2021, Treasury Board issued a new travel, meal, and hospitality expense directive, that made changes to the rules for travel and meal reimbursements for the public service. The rates in that directive were further updated as of December 1, 2023. As you may be aware, Members' Services Committee orders currently apply the 2015 version of the Treasury Board travel, meal, and hospitality expenses directive despite it being superseded by the 2020 directive that applied to the rest of the public service.

I would like to therefore open a discussion on the possibility of amending the transportation order to apply the new rates in mileage and parking set out in the updated directive that now Treasury Board has passed and that has been in effect since December 1. This change would impact members to more accurately reflect what has been taking place in the public service. It would also impact Legislative Assembly staff. A possible draft amending order was distributed to members to update these three orders. One thing I'd like to note for reference is that the off-road driving portion from the Treasury Board directive was omitted from the change.

Before I open the floor for discussion, I know that in the draft change that was circulated to the committee, it made a recommendation for the change to take place effective on the passage of such an order. I am of the opinion that that would create some uncertainty for members but, more importantly, for members of FMAS, and it would be my recommendation that should the committee undertake such a decision today, they would make that decision based on January 1 or February 1 to create absolute certainty for both members and financial management.

With that, I'm happy to open the floor for discussion on such a point. Mr. Yao, I believe.

Mr. Yao: Actually, my apologies. If there's no discussion, I'll move the motion.

The Chair: Okay. No problem.
I see Mr. Getson.

Mr. Getson: You know, just for clarity for the committee here, I'm inclined to think that the recommendations for February 1 make a lot of sense. It's clean for everybody that way to go forward. There's no back and forth or trying to add up which days were where. Let's just make it simple for everybody if that works. That would be my recommendation for discussion for the committee here.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion? Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Just to say that I agree that a February 1 coming into force makes sense.

9:10

The Chair: Are there other questions, comments, or concerns?

If not, I will ask the committee clerk to put up the draft motion. This will require two motions, one as a directive for members and the updated Members' Services orders and an additional one that will follow, that will provide a directive for the Legislative Assembly Office and their staff to update their policy. This before you is the one that specifically relates to members. Perhaps someone might like to move that and read it into the record if they're inclined, or I can. Mr. Yao.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, sir. Moved by myself that the Members' Services Committee approve the proposed Miscellaneous (Automobile Travel Allowance and Meal Per Diem) Amendment Order, 2024, to update references to Treasury Board's current travel, meal, and hospitality expenses directive in the members' allowances order, the regulations exemption, the variance order, and the transportation order, to come into force February 1, 2024.

The Chair: Excellent. Any questions, comments, concerns with respect to the motion? Anyone remotely with any questions, comments, concerns with respect to the motion?

Hearing and seeing none, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

This brings us to the second motion. I wonder if there's someone who might be willing to propose such a motion once it gets up on the screen there. I see Mr. Yao has indicated he would be willing to do so. Perhaps he might read it into the record for us as well.

Mr. Yao: I move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct Legislative Assembly Office administration to adjust the travel, meal, and hospitality policy for employees to match the rates in the travel, meal, and hospitality expenses directive, Treasury Board directive 05/2020.

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, concerns with respect to the motion? Remotely, any questions, comments, concerns?

Hearing and seeing none, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

There is no other business before the committee although we do need to have a brief discussion on the next meeting date. I'm not sure – there are two decisions that need to be undertaken by the committee. Perhaps I can poll. But the LAO will put in the final preparations in bringing the budget before the committee for us to have some discussion. I would anticipate that to be as soon as . . .

Ms Dean: End of the week.

The Chair: We will see the budget at the end of the week, and then you will likely propose a meeting as soon as next week. Is that correct?

Ms Dean: Yeah. In order for us to get our numbers into Treasury Board, we need to have a meeting next week.

The Chair: Okay. Aaron will do a quick poll of the committee today with the potential of a couple of times next week, and that will be the last meeting – correct? – prior to the budget being proposed sometime at the end of February, I suppose.

If that's fine with everyone, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. Mr. Getson. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered, and the meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:14 a.m.]

