

[Chairman: Mr. Stewart]

[2:20 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, I think we'd better call the meeting to order. Order. I didn't see John come in. That's my Whip.

Item 2 -- Approval of the January 21, 1988, Committee Meeting Minutes.

DR. ELLIOTT: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Dr. Elliott that they be approved. All in favour? Carried.

Three -- Review of the 1988-89 Standing Committee of the Legislative Offices Budget Estimates. Under tab 3 you have a number of items. First off, you have the budget that was before our meeting when we met on January 21, which was presented at that time and which was considered but not approved.

We then undertook to provide certain information that would break down the costs that relate to proposed travel for the current fiscal year. As you're aware, there are the four conferences that are scheduled with our officers. There's a breakdown of excursion fares to those destinations as well as economy fares. Also in respect to those particular conferences, there is a per diem amount for accommodation and also an amount set forth for meals at the conferences. Those days that are set forth there are predicated on the assumption that to get an excursion rate you have to stay X days or stay over a Saturday or a Sunday or whatever. So to save on the travel, you sometimes boost up on the number of days of accommodation that would be required. So that's how those figures were generated.

The whole thing is set up on a sort of worst-case scenario, at least from the standpoint that the meals are 26 at \$50, assumed that any attendee would have to pay for all the meals. In other words, there may be some that are covered by the registration costs at a conference, but that would improve the situation. This is a worst-case scenario.

Those conference days are also reflected in the Payments to MLAs insofar as indemnities are concerned. Then moving through, we have . . .

MR. ADY: Could I just ask a question, Mr. Chairman? When you were dealing with the excursion part of that and you said it may necessitate staying over extra days, were those extra days calculated into this bottom portion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. ADY: Thank you. I thought that's what you said.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next page is Status With Respect to our Existing Budget for this fiscal year, which we reviewed last meeting. On the expenditure side, that was an expenditure as at that date, January 18. It was anticipated that further expenditures that related to subsequent meetings within the same fiscal year would be added to that. So it's not how we're going to come out for the full fiscal year.

Then we move into some scenarios to see what sort of underlying costs might be associated with various travel arrangements. A budget is one member per conference at the excursion rate, utilizing the figures I mentioned earlier relative to meals, accommodation and so on, and airfare; B budget is the same sort of scenario but at the economy rate of travel. The C budget is two members per conference. Wait a minute now. Is that right? Yes, two members per conference, excursion rate. D is econ-

omy rate, leaving of course the amounts with respect to the professional, technical, and labour services category and the hosting category the same in every case. E budget is two members for each North American conference and one member for the Australian conference at an excursion rate.

Now, the budget for the existing year has a bottom line of \$35,000. You can utilize that at least for comparison purposes, when you compare it to the various scenarios that are before you. I think the only other thing to point out -- and I suppose it really doesn't need to be pointed out -- is that from year to year there will be differences with respect to the area of travel, depending of course upon a couple of things that are beyond our control, namely where those conferences are held and, secondly, the ongoing rates or fares that are required to get there in any given year, both of which are, as I say, beyond our control. However, that was the Chair's undertaking, to provide that information to the committee so that you could better assess the type of budget you feel should be built in to accommodate travel during this next fiscal year.

MR. GOGO: Two questions, Mr. Chairman, one for Louise. I don't understand excursion rate other than I'd assume it is steerage. Members who have done this, if they've done it, could maybe be helpful. Does this mean that if Glen is booked next month for a trip, if he doesn't take the trip we forfeit the money? It's that kind of trip?

MRS. EMPSON: That's right. It's very restrictive.

MR. GOGO: If Glen turns ill the day before he leaves, can John Drobot get on the plane and replace him?

MRS. EMPSON: I would imagine so, as long as the tickets get used.

MR. GOGO: I didn't think the tickets were interchangeable.

DR. BUCK: Yes, you can.

MR. ADY: You can, eh? You can change them?

DR. BUCK: It's the seat that . . . You know, you're buying a seat.

MR. GOGO: Well, I know, Mr. Chairman, that people have bought . . .

DR. BUCK: And if there's a penalty, it's a very small penalty.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's about \$50, I think.

MR. GOGO: I know people have bought tickets and then sold them. Then when the person who bought the ticket tried to get on the plane, because of the name they weren't allowed on. But that settles that.

The other thing, Mr. Chairman: there is no provision for spouses traveling?

MRS. EMPSON: None at all.

MR. GOGO: None at all. I know on CPA business and other business there's some provision. I just raise that.

The other comment I'd make is that I can appreciate how

difficult it is if we work on a certain principle of wanting one, two, three, or whatever to do things, and then if we're going to be restricted by the actual cost of travel budget, that almost says you can't be consistent with the number who travel. But on the other hand, Canberra is a long way from here, so it would be expensive. Next year, Mr. Chairman, it could be very close. I don't know where; I'm talking '89. So I don't think members of the committee should be too concerned about sticking to a fast figure, because if you know the next three are going to be, in terms of airfare, \$700 for sake of argument each year, that's only one small portion of the Canberra trip. I just raise that so members can consider it. And the final comment: I would have no hang-up about one person going to Canberra.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, I want to stand with my guns blazing or go down with my guns blazing. I still feel very adamant that we're going to do the job. We're not going down there theoretically for a holiday. Wherever we go to, we're going down there to do a job, and I think there should be a minimum of two people going to represent the province of Alberta at these functions, period, exclamation mark, end of sentence. A minimum of two, I say, Mr. Chairman.

DR. ELLIOTT: A new paragraph?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just to show you that the Chair is not going to be biased in any way in this thing, I will not be going in any event notwithstanding. Okay.

MR. ADY: Could I just ask a question? Maybe Louise can answer this. What was the percentage of increase in airfares generally between last year and this year? I think it's important to know that in view of this budget. In other words, are we dealing with a 20 percent increase in airfares across the board?

MRS. EMPSON: I haven't figured it out on a percentage basis, but last year there were four conventions of course. Two were in Quebec city and one was in Ottawa, and of course the fourth one was here in Edmonton, so the airfare would be considerably lower because of the change in venues of the 1988 conferences which, you can see, are much further away. So a great deal of difference is involved in the . . .

MR. ADY: In the venue. But what I'm really trying to find out is: are airfares up generally?

AN HON. MEMBER: Like drugs.

MR. ADY: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would think not likely if you're looking at excursion, because the competition has brought down excursion rates quite substantially.

MR. ADY: I was really looking at the economy fare.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. The economy fare may be up. I'm not sure. Mr. Fox?

MR. FOX: I was just wondering, Louise, if we take advantage of the opportunity to save money on plane tickets from time to time. If, for example, we knew we had to book a flight somewhere for some reason and a seat sale came up, do we take ad-

vantage of that?

MRS. EMPSON: Oh yes, you can. Certainly.

MR. FOX: No, I mean would you do that as a matter of course on behalf of the committee . . .

MRS. EMPSON: Yes. Yes, I would.

MR. FOX: . . . to seek the best possible price so that we may, in fact, come under budget on some of these items? Because there does appear to be a new round of competition between what is now three major carriers in Canada with Wardair entering the picture. I've read some things in the paper about, you know, possible seat sales well into the future, so we may be able to get some better deals on some of these flights.

DR. BUCK: Just to give you an example, my wife and I went to Ottawa and back for less -- the two of us -- than a member on another committee went to Toronto. Now, figure that out. So I think it's incumbent upon us as members, and our secretary -- whoever is responsible for getting the tickets -- if the dates are established fairly far ahead, to take advantage of this. I mean that's about the easiest way I can think of to save the taxpayer some money.

MR. CHAIRMAN: One other area I was just thinking of when Mr. Fox raised the matter of seat sales is the bonus-point situation. I don't know about you people, but I put in on that Canadian frequent flier thing and I'm building up points like crazy, which of course I'm not entitled to use unless it's being used for government travel. To this point in time I haven't utilized any of it for any purpose, let alone government travel. I suppose that's another possibility too.

MR. ADY: Could I ask a question on that? Would you be able to use those bonus points to take your spouse on one of these?

MRS. EMPSON: No, you can't.

MR. ADY: You cannot.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bonus points are to be . . .

MR. ADY: They must be used by the member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: For government purposes.

MRS. EMPSON: That's right.

MR. FOX: So there may be a time when . . . Are they annual or do they accumulate?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't know. Mine is up a considerable . . .

MRS. EMPSON: I asked that question and was told there is no time limit. It's not like for every year.

MR. FOX: So we may well be able to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's a possibility.

MR. FOX: . . . do some committee work at no expense to our budget in the future.

MR. GOGO: Whoever goes to Canberra, those points could be used for an airbus trip to Calgary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, has anyone else got any questions or comments with respect to what we put there?

MR. FOX: Well, I think we're all agreed on one thing; that is, that we don't want to tie ourselves to anything, that as a committee we need to be able to assess each conference on its merit versus the relative expense. I think there's concurrence in the committee on that, that we don't want to have a hard-and-fast formula that thou shalt send no more than one to every conference or we shall send two or more to every conference. We need to be able to judge each situation on its own merits. So with that in mind . . .

DR. BUCK: Derek, I didn't say that.

MR. FOX: But I think you agree with it.

DR. BUCK: I said two or more -- a minimum of two -- at each conference. If you want a motion to that effect, I'll make one.

MR. FOX: But if I say that we'd like the freedom to be able to judge each conference on its merit, that doesn't contradict what you say. It's not a specific . . .

MR. ADY: It waters it down.

DR. ELLIOTT: He's going down with his guns blazing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Carry on. You've got the floor.

MR. FOX: Okay, that seems to me something that we can all agree with. Further to that then, to get the ball rolling and risking a bit of an argument with Walt here, I would like to suggest that we send only one person to the Canberra Ombudsman Conference, given the extraordinary extra expense involved in sending a member to that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So you're in effect looking at our E budget scenario?

MR. FOX: No, I'm just looking at that one. I mean, if we're going to look at each conference on its own merit, let's do it one by one. I'm making the suggestion that one member from this committee accompany the Ombudsman to Canberra but not more than one because of the extraordinary expense involved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're making that a motion?

MR. FOX: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Speaking to the motion then.

MR. ADY: I'd be prepared to support budgeting on that basis, but again I'm not sure we should lock ourselves into that, Derek, because there might be the scenario where, with excursion rates or whatever, there may be money in the budget for two to go. So I don't see the need for us to lock ourselves into sending only

one to Canberra if we work within a budget.

DR. BUCK: And maybe nobody else will go to the other four conferences.

MR. ADY: I think the bottom line is budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other comment on that?

DR. ELLIOTT: I have a question on the motion that Derek . . . Were you making that as a general statement as guidelines to this committee or for this particular topic involving Canberra?

MR. FOX: Well, the general guideline I enunciated that I think is one we can all agree on is that we don't want to tie ourselves to anything long term, that we want the freedom to judge each conference every year on its merit. Then I made a specific recommendation about Canberra. Maybe Jack's comment makes that a little more . . .

MR. GOGO: Flexible.

MR. FOX: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think your motion is made, of course, within the context of establishing a budget. That's the item on the agenda. It's not to establish policies with respect to conventions per se.

MR. ADY: So he's making his motion pertaining to E. Is that correct?

MR. FOX: Well, no. I was just talking about Canberra.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, I have great confidence in Louise and great confidence in this committee and these members that we're not going to waste the taxpayers' money. There's absolutely no reason why all flights cannot be excursion flights for two people. Good gravy, if you book one now for October or December or whenever these things are, you're going to get the bottom price. So there's no problem, living within a reasonable budget, for two people to go to Canberra, for two people to go to all these other conferences if we so desire, if we feel the need. So I think we're really splitting hairs. If we do our job and book these things early, there can be two members going to every conference. Louise, am I being way out in left field by saying that?

MRS. EMPSON: No.

DR. BUCK: Because look at the difference between the two rates, even going to Canberra. There's such a spread between economy and excursion.

MR. ADY: A \$4,500 difference.

DR. BUCK: Yeah. That's nonsense. Anybody that pays that much we should kick out of the committee, because we're not taking advantage of some of the fares that are available.

MR. FOX: Is it not true that the cheapest prices often come up on the spur of the moment, short term? If you book ahead and you pay regular excursion fare and the seat sales come up,

sometimes without knowing it . . .

DR. BUCK: Derek, I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut that if you went down right now to a travel agent, you could get two air fares for Canberra for \$1,900.

MR. ADY: Within a 30-day time frame.

MR. CLEGG: Yeah, you're right, Walter. I think so. Don't try to figure out air fares, because I've been doing it for six . . . If you book three months or six months, you'll get an awful good rate. Then 12 hours before the plane leaves you get a better rate than anybody who's booked six months ahead. You can get on for practically nothing. But you just take that chance, you know, if you want to go.

MR. FOX: Yeah.

MR. CLEGG: We can't figure out really, but there certainly is a big saving by booking ahead. I think we should be looking at a budget here, a reasonable budget, and don't tie ourselves down to anything. With a budget of about \$40,000 or something, we can guarantee that we can look after these conferences or conventions, whatever you want to call them -- that's my view -- and still be within reason.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have a motion on the floor. I believe your motion, Mr. Fox, in effect reads that for purposes of establishing our budget for the fiscal year, we budget in the cost of one person going to Canberra. That's the extent of your motion.

MR. FOX: That's the extent of the motion. I understand the input since and don't disagree with some of the concerns raised about the motion. Perhaps it ought to be dealt with, and then we can move on with . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I've got that motion on the floor, so we have to deal with it unless it's withdrawn, amended, or whatever.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, am I clear, then, that implicit in the motion is that we're talking about E budget and travel of \$16,000? I'm confused now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, I don't think that's Mr. Fox's intention.

MR. FOX: I was talking about the specific conference. But I can see that there is a weakness to the motion. In the back of my mind . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you want to withdraw it and make a substitute motion?

MR. ADY: Or amend it to tie it to that budget even.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He can't amend his own motion.

MR. ADY: Well, we could discuss it, and someone else could amend it then.

MR. FOX: Yeah. Well, with the concurrence of the committee, I'd just withdraw it. I mean, it could be defeated and we could

go on to something to replace it, which would be just as easy, but . . .

MR. GOGO: It's got to be unanimous to withdraw.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is it agreed that he withdraw his motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's unanimous. The motion is withdrawn.

MR. FOX: Could we get the dates for these meetings again?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. The Halifax conference is the first one, and it occurs July 3 to 7. That's the Legislative Auditors' Public Accounts conference.

MR. FOX: And there are members from the Public Accounts Committee that would be going to that too.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. The second one is the International Ombudsman in Canberra, October 23 to 27. The third one is the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation in Montreal, November 27 to 29. The last one is the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws conference in Orlando, Florida -- that's the one our Chief Electoral Officer goes to -- December 4 to 7.

MR. GOGO: That's an interesting one.

DR. BUCK: Does anybody know where CPA is this year?

MR. GOGO: CPA is in Canberra.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As well?

MR. GOGO: Well, that's the international one.

DR. BUCK: I mean the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It's the same place?

MR. GOGO: International. But there's a Canadian Parliamentary conference, and I'm not too sure where that is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, today we have to come to some agreement with respect to establishing a travel budget. Now, Mr. Clegg, you seem to be along the lines of fixing a figure and working from there. Is that something you want to do?

MR. CLEGG: Yes, and I'm prepared to make a motion too. Without committing ourselves to where we go or anything, I would like to suggest that we submit a budget of \$40,241.

MR. GOGO: Is that the total budget now, we're talking about?

MR. CLEGG: Yes. That's what I'm talking about, the total budget. If we can work as a committee and if it doesn't commit ourselves to what we're going to attend, it's a figure I think we can live with, and like Walter said, if we decide to send two to Canberra, whatever we can decide to do from there, then that's fine with me.

So I'd like to make that a motion: that we approve a total budget of \$40,241, with the understanding that it doesn't spe-

cifically say that two members go to all the conferences -- I think that's a decision we can make -- or that one member goes to Australia. It's just a budget for that, realizing the kind of expenses we're going to have on these trips. It's strictly an airfare increase in budget. That's the way I feel. It's no increase for us as members; we can't control the airfares. So I'd be prepared to make that a motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So let me just understand you correctly. You were looking, you say, at a figure \$40,241. You're obviously looking at the E budget, but you're saying that you would erase any reference to who was attending what and when and so on.

MR. CLEGG: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's just the figures that are in there.

MR. CLEGG: Exactly. It might be that only one person can go to, say, Halifax or Orlando for other commitments, and then maybe two. We've got that flexibility to do what we want as a committee. But you know, we still use that, in the back of our minds, that we need this money for traveling, to at least send one person to a convention.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I accept your motion. Discussion on the motion?

MR. FOX: We must bear in mind that our budget is subject to approval or rejection by Members' Services Committee, and coming to them, while it would be -- I understand it would fall to you then, Mr. Chairman, to go to them with a budget that would be about 12 percent higher than last year, which may be an awkward thing.

DR. BUCK: That's easy, Mr. Chairman. All they ask for is an explanation: last year the Ombudsmen's Conference in Edmonton didn't cost too much to drive from Fort Saskatchewan to Edmonton or from St. Paul to Edmonton, or to fly from Lethbridge to Edmonton. It's easy to explain. We get so hung up on statistics; we set a magic figure and go and try and convince the nurses that they had an 11 percent raise a couple of years ago in Alberta.

MR. GOGO: We're really traveling afar now, Mr. Chairman. We're going all the way from Canberra to the nurses now.

DR. BUCK: I think reasonable people will accept a reasonable explanation. I guess that's what I'm trying to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other discussion on the motion? I'll call the question. All those in favour of Mr. Clegg's motion, please signify.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's unanimous.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, for information, do we eliminate the reference on the page we have of "2 Members," et cetera?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. GOGO: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And we delete the reference to E. That is the budget, then, that I would take forward to Members' Services on February 8.

Item 4 on the agenda. Before we go into that, I presume it would be in order to have a motion that the committee move in camera, as that is the normal format at the time of reviewing salaries of our officers.

MR. ADY: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[The committee met in camera from 2:42 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, I would move that you advise the Auditor General by letter of the action you have taken today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A motion by Mr. Gogo. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Carried unanimously.

Referring back to our agenda: item 5 -- Other Business. Is there any other business to come before the committee?

MR. GOGO: Have we dealt with all budgets, Mr. Chairman, including our own?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. GOGO: We've dealt with salary increases for the the Chief Electoral Officer, the Acting Ombudsman, and the Auditor General. Right?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. GOGO: So I don't know that there's anything else, is there?

I'd like to raise a matter, Mr. Chairman, and that is what your intention is with regard to this committee meeting with the three officers we're responsible for, because we talked a few minutes ago about raising the wages of somebody, and I made comments. I don't know how you evaluate, or if you evaluate. Does the committee feel that we should have them meet with us once or twice a year or three times a year to advise us of their activities? It seems to me that's only logical, if we are the employers. I put that on the table. I'd like to hear the views of my peers.

DR. ELLIOTT: In response to the suggestion, Mr. Chairman, I think we have a pretty good procedure established in the last few years of meeting with these officers: not only having them come to our meetings here, but also meeting with them in their location. The procedure, I think, has proven to be very effective; they've certainly appreciated it and been most understanding and have encouraged it. I think meeting with these officers in their boardrooms and seeing their operation and meeting members of their staff and hearing from their staff is an excellent idea, and I support the suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think that the points are well taken, and that we don't just sort of deal with the financial implications of those offices and then forget about them during the course of the year. I think that would not be carrying out our responsibilities as I am sure the Legislature would want us to do. So I think what I might do then in following up on the suggestion is to contact each of the officers and to indicate our desire to keep in close touch with them relative to matters that are ongoing within their office and the functioning of their office and any other matters that they may feel they want to bring to the attention of the committee.

Are you suggesting, Mr. Gogo, that perhaps we should establish some sort of biannual or quarterly thing automatically, or just as need may be?

MR. GOGO: Well, I guess what I am suggesting, Mr. Chairman, is, one, we have the job description of these three officers; that quarterly, you as chairman or a subcommittee of this committee with you as chairman meet with them. I think, for example, it would be entirely appropriate for this committee to say to the Auditor General: "What are your plans for the next 12 months in terms of Auditor General of this province? What are your plans, Auditor General, for innovative methods of auditing?" If I as a member of this committee pick up a publication tomorrow and discover that in Westminster the Auditor General does a certain process and it's reduced manpower costs by 10 percent, I think it's incumbent upon our Auditor General to be looking at that type of thing and advising us that he would like to revamp his office, or that he advises us that he has revamped his office.

I don't think it's fair to any member of this committee, certainly not me, to sit down a year from now and review his salary if I don't know what initiatives he's taking. I mean, scorekeepers are a dime a dozen. I don't think that's what we want to hire. I think we want to hire the Auditor General for the Assembly, doing the business of the Assembly, and an inherent part of that is to keep up to date and do various things. I don't know how you do that, unless we meet periodically. If I were to read in the *Edmonton Journal* there's been seven grievances lodged by his staff, it tells me that perhaps he's not the best manager in the world. I don't want to wait until next year's budget time to discover that.

My experience in government has been where I've utilized a performance appraisal system and sat down with managers quarterly. I made them commit themselves early in their year as to what their activities would be for the year, including the breakdown of their time, including the attendance at their conferences; to ensure, for example, that they have adequate people available if they become ill or take leave or resign or . . . In other words, I think it's incumbent upon our officers to make sure they are training replacements, rather than leave us vulnerable if they up and go -- those kinds of things. And I don't think it's fair to them not to be supervised. I mean, I just look at that as a management responsibility of the employer, and we're the employer.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we set dates now as to when we meet with them, but I think we should have that in mind, that we shouldn't not talk to them for a year. Now, Bob has already said, "Well, you know, we've had this in the past; we visit their office and so on." I think I'd like to see something with Donald Salmon's name on the heading, his job description, and a place for an evaluation somewhere in there, and I think the chairman is the ideal man to do it. If he wants a subcommittee of three

people or whatever, I'm sure any one of us would serve. I just think that's incumbent upon employers with employees. I don't want to be critical, Bob, because I don't know what's happened in the past. I don't think it's a good thing to see people once a year at budget time.

DR. ELLIOTT: I think we're on the same wavelength, Mr. Gogo, because the purpose of meeting with these officers in their shop is to bring us up to speed as to what those various officers do, and their responsibilities. Now, as far as their job descriptions are concerned, each one of those officers has been replaced recently and was hired according to a set of criteria that we set out there of what we were looking for. I don't think it would be too hard to establish with them what their job description is for the next year and what their objectives are for the next year. I think you're right. My experience with them is that they'd be very happy to review that with us. So I think it's a good exercise.

MR. GOGO: Well, Mr. Chairman, how would you feel if you were informed tomorrow that Mr. Trawick, our Ombudsman, had just accepted the presidency of ombudsmen international and that would necessitate eight weeks' absence in a year? I don't know how you'd feel. I know how I feel; I would like to know, long before the fact, that he's prepared to accept that office and he's going to be away and what the contingency plan is. I guess that's what I'm getting at. I'm not saying I'm critical. I just think -- following up what Walter Buck said a while ago -- they work for us, and we are the ones who have to answer to the Legislature if something goes wrong. So I think we should have something in place to monitor and evaluate and so on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. The points are obviously well taken around the table. In my limited experience on the committee, we have met with the officers from the standpoint of learning more about their operations and what their problems and concerns were, and at the same time establishing some sort of open line of communication with them and maintaining that. I think that's certainly not only an objective, it's a responsibility of our committee to do that, and I as chairman have the responsibility of playing a leadership role in establishing and making sure that happens.

MR. FOX: I think it's important for members to realize, too, that the three officers in question welcome visits from members of the committee . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Absolutely.

MR. FOX: . . . and it doesn't have to be formalized. I went, I believe in early October, to spend some time with the Chief Electoral Officer, largely because the committee had devoted a great amount of time and energy towards the office of the Ombudsman, having not only the conference in Edmonton but also the selection process of a new Ombudsman. I went over to see how things were going there. We had a very good exchange, and I learned a lot through the visit. So I think, you know, the opportunity's there for any of us to go.

But I do agree with Mr. Gogo that as a committee we ought to make an effort to seek out that contact more than once a year. I'd be reluctant to commit us to a quarterly sort of arrangement, and wherever possible it should be co-ordinated with a meeting date, so that we don't get into increasing the number of meet-

ings we're having in the course of a year -- you know, with an eye to our general commitments and our budget as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other new business? Item 6 -- Date of Next Meeting: I think perhaps that should be at the call of the Chair. I don't know what may come of the meeting on February 8 when I appear before that committee, and whether that would in turn necessitate any subsequent meeting of this committee. I doubt it, but it may be. So the date of the next meeting will be at the call of the Chair. Is that agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, would it be within your -- I guess I'm asking Louise. If you wanted to call a meeting for the purpose of a previous discussion, meeting with various of our employees, you could simply call that if you wanted it to be -- there may be merit in having a duly constituted meeting in order for that to be done; I don't know.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. GOGO: In which case, could we function with three or four people? Is that a problem?

MRS. EMPSON: No. As long as the committee doesn't vote any motions.

MR. GOGO: Yeah.

MRS. EMPSON: You can have two people to meet with the officers.

MR. GOGO: Uh huh. I think that gives you the freedom then to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

MR. GOGO: If you want that arranged, then, as it's convenient you simply call a meeting. Those who can attend attend, and those who don't . . .

I move we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gogo moves that we adjourn.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All agreed? Carried. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 3:28 p.m.]

