

Special Select Standing Committee on Members' Services

Wednesday, March 30, 1983

Chairman: Mr. Amerongen

7:35 a.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everybody. We could start perhaps by asking the Clerk to deal with some deferred items which were carried over from the last meeting.

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, under Code 100 salaries, the committee had requested a job description for the constituency office administrator. I have that. Perhaps we could pass it around.

Mr. Chairman, this description was of course based on the presumption that we would be asked to continue with the location of space and staff in at least some instances. However, as you can see, 50 per cent of the time is dedicated to that function. If it is the committee's decision that the Clerk's office ought not to become involved in that function at all, then I would respectfully recommend to the committee that that position not be approved.

DR. BUCK: A question, Mr. Chairman. With that observation by the Clerk, will the work that someone will still have to do as far as looking after the sorting out of the cards that come in, the telephone calls, and the information that is requested by the members, require a half a person?

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, we would like to try to distribute that remaining workload among the present staff . . .

DR. BUCK: We're talking about one additional person, though.

MR. STEFANIUK: . . . and to calculate it very carefully in the process of this year. If we feel we need a half a person, or in fact a whole person, we would like to be able to come back to the committee, perhaps halfway through the year, perhaps in connection with next year's budget, and review that particular request again.

DR. BUCK: So we'd still maintain the scroll, subscription clerk, et cetera and then possibly a part of his or her work would be part of this. I understand.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions on that point?

MR. MARTIN: I don't know how many members wanted the Clerk's office to locate space and negotiate these things. If we decide not to do it, I guess there probably should be a memo that this is not appropriate and that sort of thing. Otherwise we'll be getting a fair amount of flak if we say no, we don't do that.

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, I would expect that the minutes of the last meeting and this one will likely reflect some opinion of the committee in that regard. The fact is that it was not foreseen, to begin with, that the Clerk's office would offer this service. We very simply responded to the request which we received in the absence of any direction to the contrary. I think we now have direction. We can, I assume, say to any member who approaches us in that regard that we regret very much that we cannot perform that function,

the view of this committee that that function should be assigned to the member himself.

DR. BUCK: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So in Code 100, the new position, constituency office administrator, for \$22,752, comes out.

There was one other, wasn't there?

MR. MARTIN: That position was what, 22?

MR. STEFANIUK: It was \$22,752. So that will then be subtracted from that particular code.

MR. CHAIRMAN: With that deduction, is Code 100 then approved?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. STEFANIUK: Can we have a look at Code 290, freight and postage. We were requested to reconsider the communications allowance and to base a new estimate on the revised enumeration on the basis of 74 cents per household. We have from the Chief Electoral Officer the actual number of names on the list and that number, if you'd care to adjust in pencil, is changed from 1,386,222 to 1,435,752. The number of households becomes 717,111, multiplied by 74 cents per household, comes to \$531,228.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we have those figures again for those of us who don't write quickly.

MR. STEFANIUK: The number of electors is changed to 1,435,752. The number of households becomes 717,176. The amount is changed to 74 cents, and the dollar figure is 531,228.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion of that? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So Code 290 is approved with that change?

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, sorry for being a little late. Does Mr. Weiss's memo regarding travel allowance come under that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, that's under 290, Alan. It's on the bottom of page 8 of the support material under Legislative Assembly.

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, under Code 200, travel, we were asked to calculate the possible cost of allowing spouses four trips per year to accompany members. We estimate air fares from those communities which are serviced by air at \$31,824. We estimate accommodation at \$15,860. We are unable, of course, to estimate any additional costs for surface travel for spouses of those members living in communities that are not served by air. The estimate we come up with for the moment is \$47,684. If the program were

to be put into effect, I would recommend some small additional amount for surface travel, perhaps rounding this off at \$50,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is as to the amount, but we may have to backtrack for the specifics.

MR. MARTIN: Accommodation: does that include -- obviously I would think that your spouse, friend, or whoever you have there would be staying in the same room. Was that added as a separate room? How did you come up with that?

MR. STEFANIUK: You see, what we're up against -- when I heard the discussion the other day, the plan did not restrict itself to travel by the spouse to Edmonton, where the member presumably had accommodation. We talked instead about the spouse accompanying the member perhaps to another location.

MR. MARTIN: Yes. But I'm saying, though, that the difference would not be a total room. It would just be a double room, instead of a single room.

MR. STEFANIUK: That we don't know. This is probably taken to the maximum.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Did you base the room charge on a double room or two rooms?

MR. STEFANIUK: We based it on 61 spouses at \$65 a day, times four days.

MR. MARTIN: So that's probably high then.

MR. STEFANIUK: We also did not make a provision for meals and ground transportation such as taxis.

MRS. CRIPPS: How did you get 61 spouses?

MR. STEFANIUK: By calculating non-Edmonton members. When we did this calculation -- you recall I said to you that the only calculation I would be able to make would be on the basis of members outside Edmonton and on the basis of travel from the constituency to Edmonton, even if that were extended for other purposes. So we've taken out the Edmonton members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If we take out the Edmonton members, that limits it automatically to trips to the capital. If other members are going to be able to go between two points in a province, not including the capital, then Edmonton members have to be able to do that as well.

MR. HYLAND: But then he's just using that for calculation.

MR. STEFANIUK: Only for a calculation.

The other thing that one might have to keep in mind -- and this then becomes very complex -- is the number of members who do not have spouses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That can be arranged. It seems to me that before we deal with amounts, we have to deal with specifics. If we're going to do the Ottawa thing and provide for trips to the capital, which is how this started last year or the year before in discussion, then that will affect the amount considerably. If we're going to have provision to allow for trips hither and yon between two points in the province, then we have to go from 61 members to the total number unless we exclude -- well, ministers' spouses may want to be included.

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, what essentially we are doing here is trying to allow for a gross figure to cover it. If there is something in Calgary, Calgary members' spouses will not have to travel to it. And that balances almost exactly by numbers. If there is something in Lethbridge, it is unlikely that all members of the Legislature will be travelling to something in Lethbridge. As a method of arriving at a reasonable figure, I think what the Clerk has done is reasonable. I think he's over-allowed on hotel accommodation costs to the extent that I'm sure we have a buffer in there. I have a grave suspicion, if that's the right word, that we will come nowhere near needing that much. This is our first year, and I don't think we're going to be in budgetary problems because of it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. But may I suggest that we must be quite specific about it. Because when the year is over and the Auditor General looks at our figures, he's going to say: what's the justification for this; what was that amount authorized for? We will have to refer to either the description of the item as approved in the House or the motion in this committee authorizing the item, and that can then be used as background information. That's what's going to happen. It's happened a number of times in the past. We have to have some guidelines so we can say the money was spent within those guidelines.

MR. MARTIN: I agree.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, I'm like Dr. Reid; I feel confident that that is more than adequate. As a for instance, I'm sure I will probably use that no more than once a year. I'm sure our estimate is adequate, and we won't have any problems coming way under that. But it will be in there. I think we should give it a trial run for a year and see what happens. I have every confidence that we will not even come close to spending that much money.

MR. MARTIN: There have to be some guidelines otherwise we could be criticized for abuse. What those guidelines are, I'm not saying; it's for the committee to work out. But the purpose should be laid out fairly clearly so there isn't confusion and, if it comes up in the media, at least we can justify it. I believe that's what you're saying.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right.

MR. MARTIN: I think I would agree with that. Whatever guidelines we want -- but it should be clear what those guidelines are.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we can't satisfy the media, but the Auditor General . . .

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I'm certainly going to support the motion put forward by my colleague from Clover Bar. I really want to make my comments with regard to the guidelines or the specifics. As I understand thus far, in terms of the guidelines, number one guideline would be four trips per year per spouse, number two guideline would be based on \$65-a-day maximum for hotel usage, number three guideline would be those members' spouses who are using air fare would be the actual air fare.

I'd like to suggest two other guidelines so I could clarify this for the benefit of those members whose spouses would not be using air, and that we basically use the centage per kilometer currently in place for the public service, which I think is 21 cents per kilometer. A fifth guideline, in essence, would be for the daily food allowance. I would like us to use

exactly the same guideline as the public service uses for daily food allowances.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just one thing. What is the purpose of the trips? That's the key guideline, it seems to me. The rest of it falls into line under reasonable expenses. What's the purpose of the trip?

MRS. CRIPPS: I thought that Dr. Buck's suggestion that it be anywhere in the province that a member has to go on official government business is fair.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not government, Legislative Assembly.

DR. BUCK: Elected responsibilities.

MRS. CRIPPS: All right, Legislative Assembly. I would suggest that in order to do that, it has to be air fare to anywhere in the province. I personally don't think I would mind in the least picking up my spouse's expenses for incidentals at that point. But if it's only to Edmonton, fully half the members in the province probably would never be able to take advantage of it. I've spoken in Fort McMurray or down in southern Alberta, and it's impossible. Whereas if there's something in the city, I can drive to it, and it's no major problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As you know, drafting a text in committee is an exercise in . . .

DR. BUCK: The hon. member from Hinton has a suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before I come to it, could I just follow on what Mrs. Cripps has said. Would you agree to these two points? One, that the spouse accompanies the member; it's not for trips by spouses going off on their own. Number two, either the destination or the starting point of each trip must be either Edmonton or the member's home.

MR. HYLAND: For two reasons, Mr. Chairman, any starting trip of mine is not in my constituency. It's in Medicine Hat, adjacent to, or Lethbridge.

DR. BUCK: It's your home.

MR. CHAIRMAN: How does your spouse get from home to there.

MR. HYLAND: Obviously, she has to drive. I'm just assuming that on the proposal without Ken's suggestion . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right.

MR. HYLAND: Secondly, what happens if we are up here -- we come up on a Monday -- and there's something that the spouse comes up for, for example, on Wednesday. And they don't want to come in all week because of problems with baby-sitters, et cetera. That would mean I would have to use \$200 to get that air fare to fly home, turn around, and fly back.

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, I have a suggestion as to the occasions: functions in relation to the responsibilities as a member of the Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Four trips a year for spouses.

Now, what about the amount?. Do you want to round it off at 45,000 or 50,000, because we're really dealing in round numbers here?

MR. KOWALSKI: There's Dr. Buck's motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What was your amount?

DR. BUCK: \$50,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. So we're agreed that four trips per year for spouses' travel, where the spouse is accompanying a member in connection with his or her Legislative Assembly work, there'll be . . .

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, you can even leave that "accompanying the member"; "a spouse going to a function".

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right. For the purpose of attending a function with a member.

DR. BUCK: Because maybe your wife didn't travel with you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That looks after Alan's problem. For the purpose of accompanying the member; then we'll use the text that Dr. Reid suggested. Is that all right?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else?

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes, one more item dealt with telephones, Mr. Chairman. There had been some discussion relative to curtailing some usage of the credit card in favor of direct dialing. Perhaps the committee wishes to formalize that by way of recommendation to the members.

The second question concerned installation of a business line in members' homes at public expense, with a view to eliminating extensive use of the credit card so that the member might be enabled to direct dial long-distance calls from his home. I said at that meeting that we would have to do a study to determine what usage there was of a personal telephone for purposes of originating long-distance calls. I find that that cannot be done because our billings from AGT simply show us the city where the call originated and not the originating number, and only the destination number, or the number called, is recorded on the invoices. So we cannot carry out the study as I had hoped we could.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What would that mean for audit control of the expenditures afterwards?

MRS. CRIPPS: It shouldn't make any difference if they were only recording the city.

MR. STEFANIUK: I raise this only in connection with the study that we had hoped to be able to do and which I find we cannot.

DR. BUCK: May I ask a question of the Clerk, Mr. Chairman? I'm just a simple farm boy. I know I have a Mohawk gasoline credit card, and I have to carry

those little slips of paper. I lose half of them, so the taxpayers save some money. Can the mechanism not be as simple as this: at the end of the month, when I get my bill from AGT for direct dialing anyplace in the province and my constituency thing, I submit that bill and get reimbursed?

MR. STEFANIUK: One problem with that is that we have been attempting as much as possible to refrain from payments directly to the member lest the federal taxation authorities interpret those payments as income and the member be subject to taxation on those amounts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've run into that so many times. We've tried to arrange for parking for members at the Calgary airport. We tried that six different ways.

MR. STEFANIUK: What we are really looking for is a system whereby the Assembly pays a third party rather than paying the member directly.

MR. MARTIN: So I gather what you're saying is that probably -- using your concern that things have to be audited -- there is no way that we can do it at home, but things could be done through the constituency offices.

MR. STEFANIUK: I'm not concerned at this time about the audit. I feel there is no more difficulty in auditing calls originating on a business phone in a member's home than there is in auditing charges on a credit card. If credit-card charges were audited, we could just as easily find from them that a member's daughter called her boyfriend in Hong Kong as we could from a direct-dial charge.

MRS. CRIPPS: It might for the rural members at least -- most of us have two phones in our house because we're required to have a private phone. We've maintained the line we've kept all our lives because of other business commitments. It would be relatively easy, say, to check my phone bill and find out how many calls originate at home. Any Winfield call has originated at home. I dare say that, except when the House is in session, probably half or two-thirds of them originate from that location.

MR. STEFANIUK: May I make a suggestion, Mr. Chairman. The amount provided for in this proposed budget is obviously the maximum amount based on extensive credit-card usage. We will likely need a year's experience with direct dialing, even from the offices here or the constituency offices, to know the amount by which this can be reduced. Therefore, we're probably in an experimental stage. I wonder if members of the committee would undertake to discuss with their colleagues the question of home phone usage for originating long-distance calls relative to their roles as MLAs and come back to the committee with some advice as to whether or not it would be practical to install business phones in each MLA's home for the purpose of originating direct-dial calls from the home.

In the meantime, we may be able -- and I don't suggest we can do it over just a few days -- to come up with an estimate as to the cost of putting in place those installations in each member's home and could arrive at a figure which would at least give us a flat-fee charge. That in itself may be significant.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, if it is patently obvious that we could save a lot of money for the taxpayer, then we can start immediately using the phones in the Legislature. In your offices, our offices, and the government offices, we can start direct dialing immediately, if we're going to save a lot of money.

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes, except that there is a problem in the Legislature with government members whose phones are such that they cannot originate a direct-dial call from their own telephone sets.

MR. HYLAND: Yes, but it shouldn't take anybody longer than half an hour to pull a switch, should it?

MR. STEFANIUK: I would hope not.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're going to have to bring this to some conclusion. Is there a motion?

MR. HYLAND: One comment on this, and one on another. Obviously, if we're figuring that half or more of our phone calls are in our home -- and let's just look at the rural members. What's our average monthly telephone bill, a couple or three hundred bucks?

MISS BLANEY: A great deal more than that.

MR. HYLAND: Well, I'm talking average. Okay, say, \$400. We're paying the prime day rate, times two. So, bang, if we go to direct dialing, we're cut in half. We save \$200, for the sake of argument. What is the rent on a private phone?

MISS BLANEY: Nine dollars and eighty cents.

MR. HYLAND: That's a pretty fair saving for a \$9.80 investment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, but you have to pay for installation.

MR. HYLAND: Yes, but that's a one-shot deal, \$25.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you want some more study done on it? We're going to be meeting again anyway. What do you want us to come up with? 'Guesstimated' installation costs for as many members as may be affected?

MRS. CRIPPS: Charlene, you'd know how many members you have private lines for already, wouldn't you?

MISS BLANEY: Yes. I believe we have nine. We've done four since the election. But we've had previous ones as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's not going to preclude those phones from being used for other than MLA business, is it?

MR. HYLAND: No, but 90 per cent of the time you have another phone.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I have two now. Suppose I want to dedicate one of those to MLA business? Does that mean I may not use it for anything else?

MRS. CRIPPS: Not if you're going to charge long-distance.

MR. HYLAND: You could charge to the other number.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Shall we come back with that one? In the meantime, we'll put code 400 on hold.

MR. HYLAND: I still have one more question -- gasoline credit cards. I heard there was some discussion in Members' Services. You know, we have to carry three or four cards to catch the various service stations. I've seen AGT walk in with one little yellow card with AGT and the unit number on it. They can lay it down in Gulf, Turbo, Texaco, Shell, wherever -- no sweat.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We went into that.

MR. STEFANIUK: We did, Mr. Chairman. We determined that that kind of card is available to a limited extent, although the companies want to phase it out as quickly as possible. But it's currently available only on a fleet basis.

MR. HYLAND: What's a fleet?

MR. STEFANIUK: That means that all the cars are owned by one organization, and the billing comes in in bulk. We then do not have a breakdown as to usage by member.

MR. HYLAND: Yes, but all those things have whatever unit on them, and you could keep those numbers. You could trace it back that way instead of by name, because they all have unit 84, 86, or whatever. We could cure that. We could supply everybody with a car, and that would be the easiest way out.

MR. STEFANIUK: We determined that the policy is that it has to be an owned fleet. We have consulted with the Provincial Treasury, and the word from the Deputy Provincial Treasurer is "no".

DR. BUCK: We have a few words for him: make accommodations. I think the hon. member has an excellent suggestion. Because all you could be is number 73 or number 54, and it all comes through and is credited against my account.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wouldn't agree that the committee should be appalled by what the Deputy Provincial Treasurer says, even though he's a nice guy.

MR. HYLAND: According to the Income Tax Act, we're not a name anyway. Walter Buck or Alan Hyland would be nothing; it's numbers.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well suppose we take another look at it, as they say. We'll come back and see whether that suggestion of Alan Hyland's can be put into effect.

MR. KOWALSKI: I want to make a suggestion. In taking a look at it, you might also give us some quantitative analysis of how much additional administration this would entail. Because if in fact it would require an additional person for the convenience of one or two members, perhaps the net out would be . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Miss Blaney says she'll do that with great feeling.

MISS BLANEY: It would be considerable. We looked at that when we did the analysis. The Treasury Department requires that your credit cards indicate your employee numbers. That's why members have to keep their Petro-Canada stubs now, because those cards and statements don't come out separately. It would be more than one person, Mr. Kowalski.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll come back with some specifics.

MR. HYLAND: Can I just ask one quick question then. What's the difference between your name on the card and a unit number?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll go into it and come back to you. Okay?

DR. BUCK: This seems that what Alan is suggesting has to be simpler than carrying six cards from six different companies. Let them do the work at the other end.

MR. STEFANIUK: It's the internal audit that presents the problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We already agreed Code 400 is on hold, pending information about installation of telephones et cetera.

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, I'm not absolutely certain how quickly we can come up with those calculations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, if we can't do it before the committee finishes its deliberations, we can say so then.

MR. HYLAND: That's not going to change the numbers anyway.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. If anything, it would reduce them. It seems to me the savings would far outweigh the installation costs.

MR. HYLAND: I'm talking about the credit card billing. It's not going to change the numbers.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now that puts us where?

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, those are the questions that were raised at the last meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I'm not mistaken, we were at Code 430 the last time.

MR. STEFANIUK: You were at Code 430, Mr. Chairman. You had introduced correspondence from the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray relative to travel allowance, and you had made reference to a communication from the hon. Mr. King.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Reid, you were going to take that back to your caucus? Am I right?

DR. REID: I haven't had time yet.

MR. MARTIN: He had two. One was the telephone, wasn't it, and Mr. Weiss?

DR. REID: We can't do anything about David King's request unless we make some changes in the Legislative Assembly Act in relation to the constituency office allowance.

MR. MARTIN: What did he want again?

DR. REID: He's talking about a microcomputer or something.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It depends on definitions. We now cover . . .

MR. STEFANIUK: If he wanted to take it out of his constituency office allowance -- we addressed that last week, Mr. Chairman, and determined that it could not be done because the allowance is a statutory provision and the intentions are defined in legislation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, but at the moment, we are providing typewriters and telephone answering machines, and so on.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I don't have the Act in front of me. Is it simply a matter of definition? In my recollection of the Act . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You've got to cover it out of the appropriation in the Act. It's a matter of definition in the Act.

MR. KOWALSKI: The Act basically says, rental office space including furnishings and office and secretarial assistance and services. Is this not simply a matter of definition? Whether or not a microcomputer of the type that's being requested by Mr. King -- would that not simply boil down to a definition of what it is? It would seem to me that that would include office furnishings or services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Services certainly, if you rented it. If you bought it, it would be under equipment. But at the moment, government services are providing the desks, chairs, and the signs, if I'm not mistaken.

MR. STEFANIUK: We're paying for the signs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're paying for the signs out of general administration?

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, under the definition of office and secretarial assistance and services -- we currently have a typewriter under that definition, do we not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, that comes out of Legislative Assembly general administration.

MR. KOWALSKI: So then the alternative really to this is then to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: There are three sources of funds, if I'm not mistaken, in the constituency offices. One is under the appropriation in the Legislative Assembly Act. The other is what we get from government services, which comes in kind, rather than in funds. The supplies of course, we provide, as we do upstairs or over in the Ag. Building. The third one is what we take out of general administration for typewriters and telephone answering.

MR. KOWALSKI: So the solution to the problem then, if we want it coming out of the constituency offices, is basically to have another appropriation covering the cost of those items.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I'm not mistaken, Ken, we provide additional funds in general administration, and then give the members microprocessors out of that.

MR. STEFANIUK: If we wish. That's what we have been doing with typewriters. We've been charging it as capital expenditures.

MR. CHAIRMAN: David King's point is: how can you distinguish between typewriters and word processors, especially when you have a stage in between with those memory typewriters?

MR. MARTIN: How much money are we looking at with 79 microcomputers?

MISS BLANEY: The latest figures on purchases this week were running in between \$2,800 and \$5,600, depending on the installation that was put in.

MR. KOWALSKI: Charlene, that would be the command centre plus the printer.

MISS BLANEY: The whole package.

MR. KOWALSKI: About \$5,600. So Mr. Chairman, you're suggesting one of the ways it could be done is that it could be provided through general administration, if the Members' Services Committee would make that decision -- 79 members times whatever.

MR. HYLAND: About half a million bucks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next question that is going to arise: what about those members who haven't constituency offices? Will they be able to have them in their offices in the Ag. Building or upstairs?

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, the original concept came from members who felt that they did not need to use the whole of the constituency allowance for rent, salaries, and that type of thing, and who said, out of that constituency allowance, can I provide that out of already allocated funds? That's very different from allocating another half million dollars.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Except that, conceivably they'd be underspent on their \$13,000-odd.

DR. REID: That's true, but we are looking at a concept that the cost of providing that constituency office is currently, I think, \$13,750 a year for the office. That's the basis we've gone on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you want to make it clear that that amount may, at a member's discretion, be used for the rental or purchase -- and in the case of purchase, of course, it would become Legislative Assembly property -- of microprocessors, that will take an amendment to the Act.

DR. REID: I think we'll have to look at that in the government caucus.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So if you decide to leave it out of our present appropriations, that's the other alternative.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, it seems rather incongruous to me that if a member decides to use his \$13,700 for this type of installation and cut out half a day's secretarial or something, surely he should have that flexibility. The Act is not flexible enough to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It depends on interpretation.

MR. HYLAND: We made it more flexible and, doing that, we plugged all the loopholes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Originally it was a specific amount for rent and a specific amount for wages and salaries.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I request that some information be brought back to this committee as to what the global cost would be to provide a microcomputer plus a word processor, as well as a photocopying machine, to all constituency offices, and suggestions as to what might be the normal kinds of machines.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does the assembly agree that the administration be asked to provide that kind of information?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But we still have to think about this: there are members who don't have constituency offices. Consequently, regardless of what you put in the statute, if what is in the statute is dedicated to constituency offices, they will not be allowed microprocessors, or whatever you want to call them, into this building or the Ag. Building.

MR. MARTIN: The other thing we should keep in mind -- and I'm sure we will -- is that when we get into microcomputers, there's the initial cost, but these things change and people are going to have to be retrained. Over the long haul, we could be looking at a lot of money for each constituency office. There might be a better way to do it. It's an ongoing cost that keeps going up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Suppose we get the information. If we get it soon enough, we'll send it out to you before the next meeting and have copies at the next meeting.

MRS. EMBURY: If it's not too much trouble checking out some of this information, I wonder if you could look at buying the service as a comparison. I realize that's only relevant for certain members. That's the way some people would prefer to go, and it certainly overcomes the point that Ray has raised about things becoming obsolete very quickly. If you can, without too much trouble, I'd like to see some ballpark figures on it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On leasing instead of buying?

MR. STEFANIUK: I think what Mrs. Embury is saying is buying the service from a service bureau, for example, which certainly exists in larger municipalities but wouldn't be available in smaller centres.

MRS. EMBURY: That's right. Again, it's only going to help some people.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that enough for that one?

Okay, where does that leave us. Norm Weiss' travel allowance: I think you all have copies of that from last time we were here. Are you ready to deal with it, or do you want to have further consultation with your colleagues or staff?

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, if we're looking at the representation by Mr. Weiss, I think it probably has to apply to Mr. Notley, Mr. Adair, and -- is there one other biggy up there? Any areas you have to fly or boat in to. I think we can discuss the general principle, but I think we have to enlarge it to maybe four or five members who would be directly in receipt of this kind of subsidy.

MR. BLAIN: I'm aware of four jurisdictions where this is in effect: constituencies in northern Ontario, northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories.

MR. HYLAND: Do you know what Saskatchewan allows, Doug?

MR. BLAIN: I don't know what the dollar figure is, but I could very easily find out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What about remote B.C.?

MR. BLAIN: Those are the four that I'm aware of; I'm not aware of B.C.

DR. BUCK: I've been fighting for this ever since the day of E.C. Manning, and I almost got thrown out of caucus when I made that very humble suggestion.

MR. KOWALSKI: We won't kick you out.

DR. BUCK: I think it's grossly unfair for some members to have to be dipping into their own pockets to try to serve their constituency.

MR. BLAIN: It's very difficult for many of the northern constituencies because the only air travel is by charter.

MRS. EMBURY: I wonder if we could go back to Norm and get a budget item; just see what he would throw out.

MR. STEFANIUK: He has \$3,500.

MRS. EMBURY: I'm sorry, I missed that. I guess the only other suggestion, I wondered if we should check with the other constituents that we're . . .

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, we have some Ontario figures available already. Charlene's just gone down to the office to get them. So today we can give you a comparison to what is happening in northern Ontario.

MRS. EMBURY: Excuse me. I just meant the other three people that we're saying are affected here. Maybe we should find out if they support this concept?

DR. REID: We haven't received anything from the others. Maybe I should check that.

MR. STEFANIUK: Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman. This is what applies in northern Ontario:

Members representing the electoral districts of Cochrane North, Kenora, Rainy River, and Lake Nipigon may claim the cost of chartering aircraft used to travel within their constituency and any contiguous constituency while on business as a member of the Assembly.

Maximum reimbursement within any fiscal year is the lesser of the total costs incurred by the Member and \$2,730. This allowance includes the actual cost of accommodation during travel.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What's your wish?

MR. MARTIN: Let's check with individual members and get back. I'll check with Grant and see how it affects him.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Reid, you'll do the same with the government members?

MRS. CRIPPS: Just one point, Gerry. That's one area that's a problem. The other area that is a problem is: there are those of us who do not have any air service at all in our constituency and have to travel totally by automobile. I might say that I've gone through two cars already. My second one has 128,000 kilometres on it just in MLA travel. It's about two years old. So it's a major problem for those of us who have constituencies that cover -- Ian's another one; there's no air service, four communities at least 60 to 70 miles apart. I think Alan would have the same problem in southern Alberta.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before going to Dr. Buck, could I just suggest that perhaps you could work out a proposal on that.

MRS. CRIPPS: Just so you're aware of the problem. It's one thing to hop on a plane and fly someplace.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, I think this is probably the most progressive Members' Services Committee that we've ever structured in this Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You weren't on the others.

DR. BUCK: But I sat in on some. It's just about time that the members stopped treating themselves as second- and third-class citizens in this province. We pay our civil servants. We pay everybody else, except the stupid MLAs get to run two or three cars into the ground every two years, Shirley. I certainly endorse the sentiments of the hon. member, and I certainly think it should be looked at.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would you like to work out a proposal, Shirley, and consult with some of your colleagues who are in a similar situation?

MRS. CRIPPS: Certainly. I'll work with Dr. Reid.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next thing that's going to happen is that the far northern people who are getting money for chartering will also want money because they pound cars to pieces too.

MRS. CRIPPS: Granted. I believe they should have it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm not suggesting they shouldn't have it. I'm saying, let's look at the whole thing.

DR. BUCK: The next thing, the members may be even brave enough -- because everybody else gets cars -- to ask for a car allowance.

MRS. CRIPPS: Are you suggesting that, Walter?

DR. BUCK: I'll leave that for another time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's on the tape.

Is that all right for the moment in regard to Mr. Weiss' letter of March 22 on travel allowance?

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, if I may come back. There was one item that was going to be checked in addition; that was the cost of overprinting the constituency name and the name of the MLA on stationery. This \$48,000 item.

MR. STEFANIUK: The costs are there. I believe what hon. members had asked for was a sample. They weren't familiar. The estimate is based on usage by each and every member. We don't have actual samples as they pertain to members because the supplies have gone to members. But this is just to show you what one looks like that's been overprinted for *Hansard*. What we have printed as a standing stock is the coat of arms with the words "Legislative Assembly, Alberta" and we overprint the additional information to the extent that the member wishes us to do so. There is obviously a high cost in that letterhead because, as you can see, the coat of arms is in full color.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But of course we get quantity rates by getting a large supply and then overprinting.

MR. STEFANIUK: I am advised that the figure is high because experience has shown us that members are requesting this letterhead in considerable quantities for use in constituency offices.

DR. REID: So this is covering both the government building and the constituency offices.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Long ago, there was a decision made that we would not distinguish between supplies given in the building and supplies given in the constituency office.

MR. KOWALSKI: We have increased that one little section.

MR. STEFANIUK: Very considerably.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you content with that item? Are there any further questions, or is there a motion?

MR. STEFANIUK: We've been through 430, and we're into Code 500 on page 11, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Data processing services? Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hospitality, 510?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: 600, materials and supplies. Any questions on anything there?

MR. KOWALSKI: This is where the promotional allowance for each member comes from. The figure you have there is \$1,850 per member?

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes.

MR. KOWALSKI: That's more than the current fiscal year? Is that what it is?

MR. STEFANIUK: That's what it is currently.

MR. KOWALSKI: You mean the fiscal year ending March 31, 1983?

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes.

MR. KOWALSKI: So it's the same figure to begin April 1?

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes.

MR. KOWALSKI: Is this a statutory requirement under the Legislative Assembly Act? Or is this something simply under Members' Services?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's under Members' Services.

MR. KOWALSKI: Perhaps then Charlene might just indicate to me what the usage per member was in this current fiscal year. Did most members make use of the \$1,850 figure.

MISS BLANEY: There are only eight who have not cleaned out the account.

MR. STEFANIUK: We found a great rush on dissolution.

MR. KOWALSKI: I'm just wondering if we should look for a moderate adjustment in the \$1,850 figure. I would just raise that with my colleagues.

MR. HYLAND: Everything else is increasing, but we haven't increased that. What's the cost of pins going to do? Go up?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not down.

MR. STEFANIUK: We're shopping in Taiwan.

MR. MARTIN: This is strictly the pins, is it?

MISS BLANEY: Pins, flags, books.

MR. STEFANIUK: The 'gifty' stuff.

MRS. EMBURY: Mr. Chairman, I guess I really support looking at an increase too. I suppose it's all relative to how members use it, but I certainly found that it's a popular item and a real expectation. As far as I'm concerned, we really should be proud -- the number of students and what not, I've got in my area who are now travelling world-wide. That's good publicity for Alberta. They're so grateful, even if you just give them one or two to trade or something. I don't feel at all that I've overdone it, yet I know mine could have been wiped out a long time ago. So I would suggest an increase in that allowance.

I'd also like to ask one question. You have constituency office stationery. Could you explain that, in view of the fact that you said that the stationery was on the other page.

MR. STEFANIUK: That was the letterhead only, Sheila, that was on the other page under printing. These are all those other things, steno pads, pencils, paper clips, ballpoint pens, and so on.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, very briefly, I support the hon. member Mrs. Embury. I find it really repugnant when people who come from other countries and hand out flags, pins, and everything, and then my own fellow Albertans, my

constituents, are going someplace and they have to practically grovel to get a few pins. It really upsets me when you see a big ad that cost maybe \$10,000, in the *Wall Street Journal* or someplace promoting Alberta. You don't even bat an eye in some government department. The public relations that our own people do for us, I think should require and receive prime consideration. I would even move that that allowance be raised to \$2,100 per member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We must admit that there wasn't such a thing until recently, so we've had quite a step forward.

DR. BUCK: But I think our people deserve that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed.

MR. HYLAND: On the same point as Walter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're backing his motion.

MR. HYLAND: Yes. It's tough to go somewhere, say, with a cabinet minister and, because of his office allotment, he can give out pins, so people come to you. It makes you look like a schmo. It's even worse when you go somewhere and somebody in the department hands them out to beat hell: here, here, here. They say, haven't you got any, Alan?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have Dr. Buck's motion that -- what was it \$2,100?

DR. BUCK: Twenty-one hundred.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Twenty-one hundred I've got. Anybody give me . . .

MR. KOWALSKI: I'll second that, if it's necessary to have it seconded.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you agreed at 2,100?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sold.

Is there anything further on Code 600? Code 790, grants?

I didn't get a reaction. You're agreed on Code 600?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 790?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 850, page 14.

MR. KOWALSKI: Just one question. What is a transcriber? I hate to think that I'd forgotten to get something in my constituency office.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's a dictating machine that you listen to, instead of talking to.

MR. KOWALSKI: I see.

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, looking over previous years, I notice this item bounces all over the place: \$24,000 to \$3,000 and now to an estimated \$15,000. I presume this depends on what has to be bought or requested.

MR. STEFANIUK: That's right. It reflects current requirements, Mr. Chairman, as opposed to being something that we arbitrarily put in every year. I hasten to mention that it has been the practice of the Assembly for a number of years now to do zero-base budgeting to the extent that it's possible to do so. Obviously there are items such as telephone and freight and postage where we have to be guided by previous years' experience and simply tack on percentages to reflect increases. But other items such as this one are based entirely on a zero base.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you content with Code 850?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, we're into the Independent members. Oh, sorry, I misread the "in". It's statutory anyway. There's nothing we can do about it here. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Speaker and deputy. Code 100?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 110?

DR. BUCK: The non-permanent employee, is that secretarial?

MR. STEFANIUK: If I may explain that, Mr. Chairman, that is the secretary to the Deputy Speaker and listed under non-permanent because that is what we call a project position. The reason for that definition is that the duration of the project is the life of a Legislature. That eliminates obligation on our part in the event that the member is not returned. Most stenographers are now hired on that basis.

MR. HYLAND: Code 110, is that stenographer just for the Deputy Speaker?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 110?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 120.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 130.

MRS. EMBURY: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask a question with regard to the 6 per cent, plus 2 per cent merit. Is there some type of standard that this has been arrived at? I realize that 6 per cent is considered the basic raise, but have other people in the building been receiving a merit increase also?

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, this is based on the policy that was in effect during the 1982-83 fiscal year, which placed the maximum cost-of-living

increase for management level employees at 6 per cent and the maximum merit increase for those same employees at 2 per cent. In the event that there is a different guideline provided in the '83-84 fiscal year, obviously that will be in effect and the adjustments would have to be made accordingly.

MRS. EMBURY: I would just like to record a statement, if I may, because while I'm sure it's justified, I just think that compared to what is happening out there in the private sector, this is extremely generous. There are no merit increases, and there certainly aren't 6 per cent cost-of-living increases too.

MRS. CRIPPS: I totally agree with Mrs. Embury on that. I have many, many people in my own constituency who are taking wage decreases. Unless the people in the lower salary brackets in this Legislature are taking the equivalent increase, I certainly wouldn't see paying somebody with a high salary an 8 per cent increase and giving, say, a 4 per cent increase to somebody with a \$15,000. Their expenses are just as high for the average living costs as the person in the higher salary category.

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, just to comment, the facts are that in the '82-83 fiscal year, the increases granted to employees other than management were considerably larger, in terms of percentages, than the 6 and 2, which again is a maximum, and affected management employees.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There is usually money left over out of this appropriation because I have been very frugal. My assistants have consistently been paid substantially less than those of ministers. This amount has not changed for about three or four years. I'm substantially under it right now.

MRS. CRIPPS: My constituents are taking cuts, and we should be aware of that.

MR. STEFANIUK: Just to compare: the secretaries, clerks, et cetera have been realizing considerably larger percentage increases than management people.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This one doesn't go to arbitration.

MR. KOWALSKI: I think I would amplify that, and that is correct in terms of what my understanding is. We're talking here about a position that essentially is referred to as a management position. And management in fact did not get substantial increases in the fiscal year 1982-83, nor is it anticipated they are going to substantial increases in the fiscal year 1983-84.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Agreed?

MR. HYLAND: There seems to be a split here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What sort of split?

MRS. CRIPPS: I want to be recorded as opposed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed to what?

MRS. CRIPPS: To an 8 per cent increase.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Subject to that, are we all right on code 130. Is code 130 approved, subject to recording a comment?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 140. I don't think we have much choice on that one.

MR. STEFANIUK: That's a direct result of the others, Mr. Chairman.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 150. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 200. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I guess code 260 isn't controversial.
Code 270. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Code 280. We're on page 5.

MR. HYLAND: I just wondered why this insurance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's because of a deductible. Perhaps the Clerk . . .

DR. BUCK: It's the same as that one the other night, Alan.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're going to have to conclude shortly for today, because another committee has this room booked.
It's to cover a deductible, Alan.
Code 290. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Should we conclude there?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next meeting -- we've already agreed?

MR. MARTIN: I find that's impossible for me.

DR. BUCK: Maybe we could go through some things that are pretty well routine, like Hansard and the library, and we could wait until all the members are available for the opposition offices and the Independent's offices. Would that be agreeable?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let's just be clear about this. Dr. Buck is suggesting that we hold government members, opposition offices -- NDP and Independent members -- and do the other ones that are . . .

MR. MARTIN: Is that a long meeting?

MR. STEFANIUK: 6:15 to 7:45.

MR. MARTIN: And there's enough probably to cover.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Did we discuss whether we could meet at 7:30 on Thursday?

MR. STEFANIUK: We discussed 6:15.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In the evening, but I'm thinking of 7:30 a.m.

MRS. CRIPPS: We have caucus on Thursday.

DR. BUCK: So Thursday at 6:15.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thursday, the 7th.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I don't want to belabor this, but you mentioned something here that as a new boy on this committee I don't quite understand. When you were having an exchange with Mr. Martin, you said that if he wasn't here -- you mentioned an individual by the name of . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Henry Mandelbaum. He's a staff person from the NDP caucus.

MR. KOWALSKI: I hope the suggestion wasn't that in the event of a member of this committee not being here, there would be someone representing him.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He'll be here to give explanation with regard to questions. He won't be voting. We have Legislative Assembly staff doing the same thing.

MR. KOWALSKI: Yes, on your behalf, though, Mr. Chairman. This is a matter that I'd like to see raised because this committee is called members' services and I certainly have no . . .

DR. BUCK: Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member. These people are the same as the Clerk; they're all resource people. All he would be doing is asking if there is any information he could supply to us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Or we may ask him questions. We've done it for years. With the size of the opposition we have in Alberta, without the faculty of bilocation, the members just can't come to some meetings, so they've sent staff people. We've never met without a quorum, but we felt that to be fair, they should have some voice here. If we were going to limit our meetings to when they could attend, we might not meet sufficiently often. It's a practical thing. It doesn't infringe upon anybody's rights as a member.

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, we're talking about using him as a resource person, not as a member of the committee.

MRS. EMBURY: Further to that, Mr. Chairman, some people I think understand, but I must admit the other day I was a little overwhelmed when I walked into the room and saw so many people there. While we were introduced to everybody, I think it would help me, as a new person, to know why people are here. Now we have part of the explanation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I didn't know there was any mystification on that score.

MRS. EMBURY: Well, I found the room quite overwhelming the other day by the number of people. I thought it would just be the members and one or two. I'd be curious to know why everybody is here.

DR. BUCK: Wait until the press comes, Sheila.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I thought that I had introduced everyone and said briefly where they were from.

We're adjourned until next Thursday evening at 6:15, presumably that will be until 7:45, if we meet that evening in the House.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 a.m.