

[Chairman: Mr. Amerongen] [9:07 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we come to order. Does anyone know of anyone lurking about who is likely to arrive?

MRS. CRIPPS: Dr. Reid.

MRS. EMBURY: Yes, Dr. Reid. I think it's time to go, thank you. He must be in another meeting, but he did say he was coming.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Nigel took the trouble to come out of another meeting that he was in.

Are there any comments about the minutes of the meeting of April 17? Did I hear you move approval, Ken?

MR. KOWALSKI: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is everyone content?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Business Arising from the Minutes. The first item is adapting the rules with regard to dissolution of a Legislature to what happens when a by-election is called. You may remember that I agreed to develop some suggestions. They've gone through a number of changes, and the final one was made last night. You have the memo now, and I suggest that you accept it as information and that we consider it at another meeting, maybe the next one, after you've had a chance to digest it.

First of all, if I could go back a bit, the then Members' Services Committee in September 1982, in anticipation of the 1982 general election, worked out some guidelines. It was then new territory, because the allowances were reasonably new. We hadn't gone through a general election with the allowances in place, as they then were. Guidelines were adopted and incorporated in the Members' Guide. They are also included here under item 3(a) in your support material.

As you know, the question arose as to whether those guidelines would apply in the case of a by-election and, if not, how they should be changed. As I mentioned when we discussed the matter briefly the first time it came up, there are some policy decisions this committee should make so that specific texts

can be developed to give effect to those policy decisions. We discussed at that time whether in the case of a vacancy, by resignation or death or even disqualification of a member, the constituency secretary should be asked to continue, if prepared to do so. If not, it would seem to me that we'd have to forget about the whole thing, because who is going to hire a constituency secretary for a seat that has no member?

However, if the person continued, under the long-distance supervision of the Clerk, inquiries coming into the office could be passed on, and that's where we need to make a decision. First of all, the person who expressed the concern or sent in the inquiry might be asked to indicate: "Where do you want this to go? You have no member." One possibility is that they would be referred to the party of the member who had represented that constituency. Another possibility might be to have them sent here and referred to one of the interns, which would be more or less neutral treatment. That's insofar as new things that might arise if people knew the office was open. As I mentioned, it seems that we should try, if we can without too much complication, to continue looking after those people during the vacancy, so they don't have a disadvantage in comparison with other constituents.

We'd have to make a decision as to what happens to older things that are under way in the office. Suppose that when the vacancy occurs, the member happens to be looking for a lost pig. As you know, that was a long story. Who's going to take over the search for the lost pig, pending the vacancy? I'm supposing, of course, that most of the concerns will be a little more serious than that. You know that the lost pig story actually happened.

The other thing would simply be to shut it down, which is what they do in Ontario. They say: "Okay, the member resigns, dies, or is disqualified, and we shut the constituency office down." As far as we in administration are concerned, that would be the simplest. We would probably pay the rent. We might forfeit the space if there's a provision in the lease that says you can't leave it vacant, as there is in some leases. We could leave it vacant, and we might be responsible for anonymous damage that occurred while it was vacant.

I'm not suggesting you'll want to decide this

today, but I thought I'd open up the topic and leave this memorandum with you.

MRS. CRIPPS: Did you say that if you locked the door, you might be responsible?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. You see, the Clerk is the tenant of every constituency office, but it's used by the member. The Clerk signs all the leases and pays the rent.

MRS. CRIPPS: So you would be under an obligation to pay the rent whether the door was locked or not.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If we left it open and some vandalism occurred as a result of its being open -- it could be an iffy situation, but I could see a landlord coming along and saying: "If you had used that office the way you were going to when the lease was signed, the vandalism wouldn't have occurred. Now it's known the place is empty." There could be a claim; hopefully it would be covered by the landlord's insurance.

MR. HYLAND: Just briefly looking through this, I have some concerns with it. The member, especially a member who is running again -- there are some calls that come in, and some people don't realize there's a break when a new election is called, and they still expect you to do certain things.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This doesn't apply to a general election, where a member may be running for re-election. Those guidelines are in place. You may want to update them. Some of the language is not as good as it might be. What we're talking about is a vacancy like the one that occurred in Spirit River-Fairview.

MR. HYLAND: I was reading the "Re: Use of Constituency and Legislature Offices and Other Support Services by M.L.A.s . . ."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, damn; I'm sorry. You're right; that's a misleading headline. You're absolutely right.

MR. HYLAND: It should be "By-election" not "General Election". That's why I couldn't quite put the two together.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're absolutely right.

Do you want to let it go at that and give it a thought?

MRS. EMBURY: Great.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm not aware of any pending vacancies.

MR. HYLAND: Just change the reference on the next draft.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Exactly. It will reappear in your support material.

Pensionable Fees. You may remember the question having been raised as to whether the fees members get for attending committee meetings outside session should be included in calculating pension entitlement and contributions. Members were going to take that to their respective caucuses. Two of the caucuses aren't represented at all this morning.

MR. KOWALSKI: May I ask a question for clarification? When we talked about this the last time -- I guess this is an administrative question as to the application of the deduction and the application of the deduction at source.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not really. It's a question of members' benefits and what the members . . .

MR. KOWALSKI: I appreciate that. I have no problem with the general principle. I'm totally supportive of that. But I have a question for information that I need with respect to how the administration of this might work. The way it essentially works right now is that you get paid your stipend by the month and you get a deduction for the month. In terms of fees from agencies, boards, and commissions, you get a monthly deduction. It wasn't that way two years ago. As an example, when I sat on the Syncrude board, no deductions were taken for a 12-month period. Then I requested a change of the sponsoring department and had it done on a monthly basis. How do you see this being implemented with respect to the deductions for special committee meetings? Will we do it once a year or every time there's a meeting? Looking at it from an administrative point of view, it seems to me it would be much easier to do it once a year.

MR. STEFANIUK: The intent of the proposal, if you like, was that at the end of a given year, the administration wouldn't have to go chasing after the member to make a lump-sum contribution, and the member wouldn't be in a position where, at the end of a calendar year, he or she had to dig into his or her pocket to come up with that contribution in order to make those fees pensionable. So I would see, for administrative purposes, these amounts being, depending on — I don't think it's carved in stone at all. If there is some frequency to the claims, then we could do that on a monthly basis as well. If the frequency is somewhat less, I could see us doing it on perhaps a quarterly or a semiannual basis. But we wouldn't want to place the member in a position, on an ongoing basis, where the member had to come up with the money in a lump sum at the end of the year.

Now, there is another slight problem that complicates this issue. There is a Bill before the House now, Bill 48, the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act, and that Bill provides for all earnings of members, including fees paid through legislative committees, to be pensionable. We had understood that it was proposed to bring an amendment in to that Bill and remove fees paid for service on Legislature committees from pensionable service. Michael Clegg has written to the Provincial Treasurer, urging that such an amendment not be brought in and suggesting that those fees, like any others, are worthy of being pensionable. We don't know where the Provincial Treasurer stands on the matter right now. Consequently, I think it must be left in abeyance once again until a decision is made by the government as to what it will do relative to Bill 48, whether it will bring in that amendment at the committee stage or not.

I don't know we can progress this further, Mr. Chairman, in light of this slight complication that has occurred. But we don't see the administration as being a problem. When a member files a claim for attendance at a meeting of a Legislature committee, be it a standing or special committee, we would have to separate the fee from the expenses. But it seems to me that that's a very easy task.

MR. KOWALSKI: Okay.

MR. STEFANIUK: And the expenses would be paid promptly, whereas the fee would go into a

payroll account, if you like, and the appropriate deductions made from the fee.

MR. KOWALSKI: Depending again on the status of that particular Bill.

MR. STEFANIUK: Bill 48.

MR. KOWALSKI: What was that clause number again?

MR. CHAIRMAN: While the Clerk is looking — as I see it, if that Bill goes through, this item is superseded.

MR. STEFANIUK: 42(1)(a) of the Legislative Assembly Act is referred to in Bill 48.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Is that enough for that one?

MR. KOWALSKI: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next one is just a report item. I had agreed to take up with the Provincial Treasurer the possibility of long-term disability coverage for members, similar to that provided for ministers. However, after thinking about it, it seemed appropriate that I should first go to the Minister responsible for Personnel Administration, and I did that. We had a discussion about it. It was my view that we would simply ask to have the order in council that provides the coverage for the ministers amended to include the members. Greg Stevens thinks that that may not be necessary. He thinks it can be done by an order of this committee, but he has agreed to get a legal opinion on that and to get back to me. So that's where it sits. I felt that going to the Provincial Treasurer would be the next step, after finding out what the cost was and finding out that we could do it. Otherwise, there'd be no purpose.

We have no visitors, no Concerns of Visitors.

Under Other Business I have some items to raise. If anyone else has any, would you like to raise them now?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, it's just a matter of a request being made for perhaps a review of this particular matter. It deals with the question of the group life insurance plan as currently provided to all Members of the

Legislative Assembly. I bring it to this committee meeting, because a number of members of the Legislative Assembly have raised it with me. It is my understanding that under the members' group life insurance plan the participation of an individual in the plan terminates when the individual is no longer a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that's right.

MR. KOWALSKI: The question was raised with me: would it be possible, under the group life insurance plan, to allow a member who is no longer a member to continue to participate in the plan, recognizing that he or she would be responsible for all of the contributions that have to be made? The reason it was brought to me was that in the event that there are some people who are older than others and who might find that their decision to leave public life — they may find difficulty getting insurance because of their age or something else. The thought there basically was to allow them to continue to be able to participate in the group plan, but they would have to pay all of the fees associated with it.

MR. STEFANIUK: I think, Mr. Chairman, that the principle of a group plan indicates that those who may participate are those who continue to constitute a certain group, but I believe that some plans have a conversion clause which allows a former participant to convert to some form of private coverage, having regard for the fact that he or she may have earlier been a participant in a group plan. I think it's a question of investigating whether that provision is made.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll make inquiry and report back. Anything else?

MRS. EMBURY: Mr. Chairman, I really should have raised it under Business Arising from the Minutes. Under item 5 in our minutes it's noted that you would report back on Mrs. Cripps' request to get a hot plate to heat coffee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh damn. Right. We made that inquiry. I've got the report, and we forgot to put that on the agenda. Rod, you've got the answer.

MR. SCARLETT: They have a hot plate. All we have to do is request it.

MRS. EMBURY: Are you saying there's an extra charge?

MR. SCARLETT: There's no charge for it. They'll send it up. It just has to be requested.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Damn, why didn't we do it for today?

MRS. EMBURY: I was wondering why you didn't do it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Henceforth.

MRS. EMBURY: Thank you.

MRS. CRIPPS: It should come as a matter of course.

MRS. EMBURY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to raise one other issue. I wonder if you could just tell us where your consultant's report is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have that. That's on my list.

MRS. EMBURY: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there anyone else who has any other matters to raise? I have four. The first one is the Fleming report. A week ago Monday I spoke to Bob Fleming. It's coming along, and he expected to have a first draft in my hands this month.

The second one is that we have this old item about inviting Mr. Senchuk. Did we drop that?

MR. STEFANIUK: No. It was decided by an earlier meeting that he would be invited to a meeting in June.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So we'll invite him for next month. That's regarding television in the House and whether ACCESS can be involved.

The third one is — I'm not sure if I mentioned this at the last meeting or not. We got an offer from the Secretary of State to provide us with the lists of new Canadians, people who have just become citizens. Years ago we used to get them directly from the citizenship court here,

but now the lists are apparently made up centrally in Ottawa for the whole province. Apparently they're made up monthly. The first list arrived a few days ago. The Clerk reviewed it. As you know, there's a condition that it may be used only for the purpose of sending greetings or a welcome to these new citizens. We're not supposed to add them to our party lists, for example. Anyway, the first list came, and there are some 1,200 names on it. Isn't that right, Bohdan?

MR. STEFANIUK: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But they're all over the province. Now the question is: how do we get that information to members? We haven't the staff to go through them and pick them out, set them up on a machine, and have them sorted out according to constituency. The simplest alternative would be to send them out on the honour system, give each caucus a total list and let them pick out their constituents, or send greetings to the whole list if they want to. The question would then arise whether we would also send them out to all recognized political parties. That hasn't been cleared with Ottawa. What your thoughts are, I don't know.

MR. HYLAND: Aren't they divided any more by federal constituency boundaries?

MR. STEFANIUK: The list is alphabetical by surname and goes right through the province from A to Z — 1,200 names. We have that list, as the Chairman said. I got it and looked at it. It appears to be a computer printout.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's good quality. You can copy it all right.

MR. STEFANIUK: But it's a question of someone sitting down and determining which constituency each address falls into. You can appreciate that with 1,200 names, that's quite a task, especially in the urban constituencies of Calgary and Edmonton, where the boundaries can go down the middle of certain streets. As the Chairman says, we don't have the manpower to do that manually.

I think there may be means by which we could do a sort, if we could receive the list electronically. I was just proposing to the Chairman before the meeting — we have to be

in Ottawa June 1, and I would like to try to meet with the appropriate people in the Department of the Secretary of State and discuss with them the possibility of sending us the list electronically. We could write the appropriate program for our computers here and do a sort in that fashion, which would perhaps then enable us to provide each member with his or her new constituents.

MR. HYLAND: And it wouldn't take a lot of manpower.

MR. STEFANIUK: Not if we could do it by machine.

MRS. CRIPPS: I have some concern about sending the entire list out — you mentioned to all political parties too. I thought the purpose of this was for the representative of the area personally to be able to send congratulatory — I think that's all we want and that's all the information that should be made available.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think just what you said would be the purpose implicit in what we got from the Secretary of State.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I've listened very carefully to what you and the Clerk have been saying over the last number of months about the large amount of work that the staff associated with Legislative Assembly has to undertake and deal with. It seems to me that the process in question is one that puts one burden of additional work on your shoulders. Mr. Stefaniuk, I would request that when you meet with whoever it is you're meeting on June 1, perhaps you make the suggestion that, from the position of the workload and effectiveness and efficiency, the way it should be dealt with is that the federal Members of Parliament might simply want to provide that information directly to the individual MLAs who have constituencies within their federal constituencies. Then you're not involved in any additional workload at all, and that would certainly reduce the workload on all of us. For an individual MLA to go through this list and sort seven names out of 1,200 is really time-consuming. Personally, I'm going to be calling my federal Member of Parliament with this suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Of course, it's going to mean more work for them.

DR. REID: They get it by constituency.

MR. KOWALSKI: They do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: By federal constituency.

MRS. EMBURY: Yes. But to my knowledge we're talking about — and I'll exaggerate — maybe 10 MLAs that don't get them. I know it's less than that. We're not talking about all the constituencies in Alberta. There is a very easy system in place right now. I think there is a problem with some MPs, whether it's lack of knowledge or choosing to do it through their offices. But I get the two lists from my MPs. It comes regularly. Sure, it covers his riding, so that means it's four provincial constituencies. But it's easy for me to pull out. I see this as becoming terrific. Then this idea that you've got the names — we're just subjecting the Legislative Assembly to having access to a whole bunch of information that we really don't want. All you want to do is to make it accessible.

So I'd sure support what Ken said, if Bohdan could clarify this and see if it couldn't be done that way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Would that mean that you would get it to go through the MPs, or would you get Ottawa to send it to us on a federal constituency basis?

DR. REID: From the offices of the MPs. They'd just photocopy it and put it in an envelope.

MR. KOWALSKI: Directly from the offices of the MPs. You don't have to worry about it at all.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. The last item I have relates to the purchase of equipment or material or the engaging of services for members' constituency offices. The suggestion I would like to make to the committee for consideration is that each member be issued a purchase order book for making those purchases. The books would be numbered, and a copy would be left in the book. There would be a running record. As a matter of fact, if we

had them in triplicate and a copy were sent here, that might be another embellishment we could consider. There would be a total record of everything that is ordered, as long as members would remind themselves from time to time that they wouldn't incur any liabilities against their allowances without using the purchase order book. One of the drawbacks might be that if one of those books were lost and an unauthorized person got hold of them, there might be a big order made and we'd be stuck. The person using that book has the possibility of binding the funds of the Legislative Assembly for payment. Would you like to think about it?

MRS. EMBURY: Mr. Chairman, just off the top of my head, I think it sounds like a useful suggestion. In my mind, you're only helping the MLA to do what we should be doing. When I think back to the system, we've come a long way from when we could just place a call and find out where the allowance was, to moving on to computer lists. I still think we have to develop the process a little further, as has been proven with our printouts. I think it would probably assist members to have that ongoing record, either themselves or in their constituency offices. They don't all have offices, so however they choose to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We could put a text on them, that the validity of each order depends on the genuine signature of the member. That might help protect us against forgeries. It's something the committee might wish to consider. We would have to find a means of providing the forms and issuing them. It might also require an amendment by the committee to the order under which those allowances are provided, to make it a condition that they be spent through the use of a purchase order. The staff who serve the members use purchase orders. It's a good, systematic, tidy way of keeping track of public funds. I'd suggest we give it serious consideration.

DR. REID: It sounds like a good idea on the surface of it, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to ask the Clerk: in order to keep track of what is happening through that system, would you have to get a copy of that purchase order rather quickly?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That would be the idea.

MR. STEFANIUK: If the administrative branch of the Assembly were expected to provide up-to-date records relative to the status of any one member's allowance, then the purchase orders might better be issued by that administrative branch on the request of the member. I know that purchase orders have from time to time been generated by the administrative branch as a result of a telephone call placed to the branch by a member. I can recall one that came through me, for example. A member was ordering book matches in great quantity. He had spoken with a supplier in his constituency, called us, asked if we would issue a purchase order to the supplier for the appropriate quantity, and named the amount. That would enable us to immediately show a tentative debit against the account. It would enable us to maintain a very accurate record.

In normal handling of accounts payable within the administrative branch we require, in order to process a payment, a copy of the purchase order, a copy of the delivery slip, which witnesses that the goods or services were received, and a copy of the invoice. The three documents constitute authority for payment or issuance of a cheque by the Provincial Treasurer. It seems to me that a similar system concerning purchases which were initiated by members would enable us to maintain a much more accurate record.

As well, I think we might be able, in approaching a year end, to contact suppliers whose invoices had not been received and to urge them to provide us with those invoices prior to a fiscal year end so that we could bring our financial records up to date and, in fact, be able to close the books by the end of a year.

We just heard of an instance this morning where a service was provided to a member in December or January, and the invoice for that service was received this week. Obviously, we had closed the books. We didn't know it was coming, because the administrative branch was not aware of the commitment the member had made.

So if we were to adhere to a system of purchase orders, I think we could maintain much more accurate records and close transactions in a much more satisfactory way.

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, that takes me back

to what was going through my mind. Would it be possible to develop a system where the members or the constituency offices could have purchase order books for items up to a certain amount that they could do themselves for speed and ease, and then over a certain amount could be done by the telephone system? You know, the telephone is a wonderful aid to all of us and saves a lot of paperwork. It's faster, providing people record what they've said and done. I think the combination might work very well to avoid some of the problems we had at the end of the last fiscal year, yet enable members to make some decisions and do things themselves on the smaller items, which tend to cause just as much trouble as the great big ones.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, if you have to look for them. Well, suppose we conclude that in our consideration of this thing. Another thing we might do — I don't know how many copies there'll be; hopefully not too many. Suppose there were three: one to go to the supplier, one to the office here, and the third to be kept by the member.

MR. STEFANIUK: Mr. Chairman, there is a prescribed form in place, and it is a multipart form that enables the originating person or branch to retain a copy, and several others are distributed, by virtue of their identification, to those people who have to be concerned with processing the accounts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've seen them. I'm not totally familiar with them. What I'm thinking of is that the last copy, the one that stays in the book, could have a provision on it as you have, or used to have, on the stubs of some chequebooks, where the member could keep a running balance of what's left in the allowances. Each time, the balance would be brought forward, the new item deducted, and that way the member could see at a glance how each of those allowances stood. If a transfer were made from one allowance to another, that could be shown in the same way.

DR. REID: We're not all the world's best bookkeepers. I'm speaking from personal experience.

MRS. EMBURY: I think it's certainly worthy. It seems to me you're gaining some support

around the table for helping the members in this regard. I guess I'd like to consider it and have your office consider it a little further too. I guess it sounds so great to me and simple . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're suspicious.

MRS. EMBURY: All simple things don't turn out to be simple. I'd like to know if it could be that simple; as you said, a nice book in triplicate. Then I would like to know . . . We've got to anticipate what this is going to do to the staff in the Clerk's office. We have to balance out the request for more staff if people are overworked and whatnot. I can't imagine at this time that we're about to consider that, so it's got to be something that could either be put on the computer or adapted so it wouldn't cause a lot of extra work.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Suppose we bring back what you might call a feasibility report -- I'd like to say "to the next meeting," but I think it should depend on how long the House is going to sit. It might be the meeting after, although there wouldn't be anything to prevent us from reporting to the members directly, without a meeting, by means of a memo. Would that be all right?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have no other Other Business. Unless someone else has, the next item is the date of the next meeting, normally the second Wednesday in June, which I think is the 11th.

MRS. EMBURY: The 12th.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Wednesday, the 12th. Right. Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Same time, 9 o'clock. Plus a hot plate.

MRS. CRIPPS: I think I'll be tied up that day.

DR. REID: Mr. Chairman, about the time of the meeting. I know my schedule and nobody else's mix. I have a regular meeting of the social planning committee of cabinet that day,

Wednesday, at 8:30, unless it's cancelled, which it was today. I don't know about the rest of the members. Is it possible to have this meeting in the second half of the morning rather than the first half?

MR. CHAIRMAN: How about that?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I have no difficulty at all with that. I think the only reason we went to 9 o'clock is for meetings when the Legislature was sitting. I would presume that outside the Legislature there is more flexibility for us to meet in the afternoon.

MRS. EMBURY: What time do you suggest?

DR. REID: 10 or 10:30 until lunchtime or something like that, rather than 9 o'clock to 11.

MR. HYLAND: That is better for me too, because I get the 6:20 plane out of Medicine Hat to get up here, and that gives me an hour in my office before. So if we haven't had the material before, at least it gives an hour to go over it.

MR. PENGELLY: It would be even better if it were in the afternoon. I could drive up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So are we talking about the afternoon or, as Dr. Reid suggested, the second half of the morning?

MRS. CRIPPS: We have a lot of committee meetings in the afternoon.

MRS. EMBURY: Delegations.

MR. KOWALSKI: 10:30 would be fine with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those Government House meetings? 10 or 10:30? Alan, you're the farthest away.

MR. HYLAND: It doesn't matter. Either one. I'd even make 9 o'clock, but anything else is that much better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: 10:30? Okay. 10:30, Wednesday, June 12.

Well, we're ready for the coup de grace.

MRS. CRIPPS: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Everybody agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The meeting is adjourned.
Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 9:50 a.m.]

