

Title: Wednesday, December 14, 2005
Date: 05/12/14

Time: 1 p.m.

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It being 1 o'clock and it being December 14, we'll call this meeting to order.

Prior to going to the approval of the agenda, I'm going to ask the Clerk to introduce the men and women of the Legislative Assembly Office that are with us here today. David.

Dr. McNeil: Acting as our secretary today is Micheline Orydzuk, the bills and journals clerk. In the back we have Scott Ellis, the director of financial management and administrative services; Jacqueline Breault, who is manager of financial services; Cheryl Scarlett, who is director of information technology services, human resource services; Shannon Dean, whom everybody knows; Rob Reynolds, Senior Parliamentary Counsel; Brian Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms.

The Chair: You got them all? Okay.

Item 2 is the approval of the agenda. This agenda was circulated to members several weeks ago, and documentation was forwarded approximately a week ago, and then earlier this week, on Monday, there was additional documentation. We may have a handout or two here this afternoon.

If we have time this afternoon, there is one additional item that I may want to bring on under 6, Other Business, and that would have to do with home security systems. Would there be any other additional ones that members would like to add to this agenda today?

Then, can we have the approval of the agenda? Mrs. Jablonski and Mrs. Ady.

The minutes we have of the June 21, 2005, committee are attached. They have been circulated. There were several items arising out of those minutes, which are identified under item 4. Any concerns with the minutes? Everything the way it's supposed to be? Could we have approval of them, then, please, as well? Mr. Knight, Mr. Martin. Thank you very much.

Business arising out of that. There was item under 4(a) in the binder, that had to do with a question that an hon. member raised with respect to those men and women who work in constituency offices. It was a question with respect to the possibility of a retroactive purchase of pensionable service by constituency employees who did not have pension negotiated as part of their contract of employment with the Legislative Assembly. Members will note that in the last year we've been advocating very strenuously that all constituency office staff should in fact have participation in the public service pension plan, but this question has to do with a subject dealing with people who had not signed up prior to the time. The Clerk had done some work with respect to this. David, do you want to add anything to that?

Dr. McNeil: The indication we've had to this point – but we don't have it officially yet – is that it looks quite positive as to a one-time possibility for enrolment for prior service for constituency employees. We don't have an official indication of that yet, but it looks positive at this point, and that comes from the Alberta Pensions Administration. As the briefing note indicates, we should have a formal indication in January as to a final decision in that regard.

The Chair: Mrs. Jablonski.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is: once we get the results of this and we set the path, will we make a buy-back package optional to the constituency staff and not mandatory?

Dr. McNeil: These things are always optional. It's not a mandatory thing. If people want to invest their money in prior service, that's totally up to them. We'll just provide them with the opportunity to do so if they so wish, and that would be, you know, at their expense.

The Chair: Do you want another one?

Mrs. Jablonski: Yeah. Supplementary to that, is the pension that's going to begin for constituency staff as of April 1, 2006, optional or mandatory?

The Chair: Well, it's optional, but I am going to make a strong recommendation to all Members of the Legislative Assembly that they view this as a pretty significant matter for their constituency office staff and do everything possible to encourage them to do that. From my perspective I just find it almost unfathomable why somebody would not want to, but that becomes subjective.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you.

The Chair: Barry and then Cindy.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I understand that there's no firm decision yet, David, but would it be a situation where they would have to buy all their previous service? In some cases I think it could be pretty cost prohibitive if they have to pick up both employee and employer shares.

Dr. McNeil: No. You know, if they have \$5,000 to invest, then they can buy back whatever service that would provide. There's no obligation in terms of the total service. It's not all or nothing.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Ady: Then I guess my question is: will there be a matching component by government? Will there be any kind of a match?

My other question: because they're under a yearly contract, is it only going to last the year? It's long-term disability insurance that we're looking at, correct?

The Chair: No, no. We're talking pensions.

Mrs. Ady: Pensions? Sorry. Okay. I'm confusing the two issues. I'll go back to that.

But is there a matching component by government?

Dr. McNeil: No, there's not.

The Chair: Not government. This is the Legislative Assembly.

Dr. McNeil: It's not contemplated that there would be a matching component, no. It would be up to the individual employee to buy back their prior service, both the employer share and the employee share, as is the case with these situations in other circumstances.

Mr. Shariff: It's my understanding that in the public service if you want to buy back pension, there are options for you to lay it over a longer period of time. Let's say that you worked in the constituency for 10 years and you want to buy 10 years of service. You could make arrangements to pay over the next five, 10 years towards it. That exists in the public service pension plan.

Dr. McNeil: The same provisions that would apply with respect to

any public servant would apply in these circumstances. Once the decision is made that it's possible, then we'd have the same policies that would apply.

Mr. Knight: It may be premature here, but when you come out with the firmed-up kind of decision with respect to it, would you also provide us with the tax implications?

The Chair: You want the tax implications? These are for your constituency offices.

Mr. Knight: I understand that.

The Chair: They would get that through our human resources people. They'd have all that.

Dr. McNeil: It would be up to each individual as to what the tax implications are.

Mr. Knight: Well, generally there'll be an implication with respect to buying back.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. There would be an analysis for each individual employee as to what the tax treatment would be, and it would depend on how much RRSP room they have and so on. You can't generalize as to how the tax treatment would be for any employee. It's specific to the individual.

The Chair: To my knowledge this is one person we're talking about, so let's not get carried away here with micromanaging the whole world. Okay? If it can be done, we'll do it, and we'll do it in accordance with the rules of the public service pension plans and everything else and be consistent with it.

Mr. Backs: Is this plan, if it's put in place, just envisaged to apply to existing employees or to past employees as well?

The Chair: The existing ones.

Mr. Backs: If somebody was constituency staff 10 years ago and didn't do it, this is not looked at?

Dr. McNeil: No. It would be just existing employees.

The Chair: We don't anticipate this as a large number of people. I mean, we're responding here to a request, and I think it was Mr. McFarland who raised it. Should it become in the affirmative, it would be my view that we would just move with it and make that option available. Now, that person may turn it down.

Okay. Anything else?

The second one. There was discussion last time with respect to caucus budgets, so basically I indicated at the last meeting we had that we would put together two draft documents. They are titled draft documents. The first one is called Caucus Expenditure Guidelines. Again I repeat the word "draft." What I'd like to do is briefly take you through it. My suggestion is that I'm going to leave it with you, and you can go back and visit with all the other people in your caucuses and everything else and see how you want to proceed with it.

1:10

Look, the bottom line of the whole thing is that we've got actually very, very good guidelines for the utilization and the expenditure of

constituency office allocations. They're very, very clear. This cannot be used for anything that has any kind of a partisan, political nature associated with it. We've always transferred that philosophy to caucus expenditures and the like. So we put this little overview together, and I'm going to quickly go through it.

If you flip over the first page, the overview says why we were doing it and the purposes. We basically, again, consulted with all other governments across the country of Canada dealing with caucus expenditures and the like, and needless to say, the "sufficient control, review, authorization, support and reporting for expenditures of public funds" is consistent, the stated purpose, and you can't exceed approved budget limits, and "to ensure that the establishment and use of the funds adheres to applicable legislation and regulations" are all in place. "To ensure that the expenditure of public funds are incurred and reported in a transparent, open and accountable manner." You might want to underline "transparent, open and accountable manner" because we give caucuses one line, one number, and each caucus then determines how they apply those funds within their own caucus. We don't micromanage the caucus funds like we do with the LAO, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, funds, where you see the whole budget document.

The second one, the caucus expenditure principles. Again, across the country and for ourselves as well appropriate guidelines are in place. We have the Auditor, who will review these things. I've not had any questions coming back to me as Speaker from the Auditor with respect to questionable expenditures other than the normal thing that the Auditor has asked us to do in the past, which was responded to.

The second point: "Guidelines and review must be in place to ensure that Caucus activities and transactions are separate and distinct from any party activities, events or transactions, and in particular, election activities." That's an area that I'm going to draw to your attention to make sure that, in fact, that is the case because in the reviews that we have to make and the appeals that come to my office, they're always seemingly on the edge of that and that this statement does not apply to all three caucuses.

"Guidelines should be in place to ensure that there is no interference in the voting and election process." Okay. "A clear and concise policy statement or document that indicates the purpose of the funding and defines what an acceptable expenditure is and what is not" and "a fair and impartial process for dealing with disputes."

Then we looked at, you know, a comparison of other jurisdictional caucus expenditure practices, and basically we've got some words in there that you've been able to take a look at, and there's a flow sheet that goes with this as well.

Then draft caucus expenditure guidelines. Once again, the purpose, acceptable expenditures, which is outlined on the next page under point 2, and the processing of the expenditures and the reporting. We've got good systems in place for all of that.

Restrictions on caucus expenditures. I just want to draw that to your attention.

- Caucus activities and transactions should be separate and distinct from party activities, party identity (logos, colors, web pages), events or transactions, and [again] particularly election activities. Furthermore, that during an election period, Caucus activities and expenses should be restricted to ensure that there is no perception of utilizing these funds for electioneering activities.
- There should be no appearance of influencing the voting public by making payments to individuals or organizations that are donations (cash or in-kind) or are of a fundraising nature.

Again, we do have an appeal process if required, and there tends to be one across the country.

The next thing you've got is a flow sheet – Appendix A is what

it's called – where we basically have those same practical heads or agenda items and looked at a number of jurisdictions across the country: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec. We got no response from Newfoundland, no response from P.E.I. but did get responses from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and the Canadian House of Commons. There's pretty good consistency though, and there is consistency among the provinces on this whole subject matter.

The one area that caused a little bit of difficulty in the last couple of years is the application of some of these rules by the Canadian House of Commons, where it's almost that once you get away from the pure, philosophic argument that these funds, because they are public, taxpayers' dollars, are not to be used for any partisan purpose whatsoever, you see the situation develop in the Canadian House of Commons where party name and party logo almost become out front on most of this stuff. It gets then really, really confused when publications come out that may be funded by public dollars, issued by caucuses but which clearly will identify the name of the caucus on the document.

It becomes even more confused when it comes to the franking privileges, or the mailing privileges, of members of the Canadian House of Commons. We have no franking privileges in Alberta, and we've always, always, always stayed away from this identification. But in the last year or two this is an area that seems to be tested quite a bit, and I just throw this out to you as the expenditure guidelines. I'm going to repeat again that we will turn down, as we have, expenditures that do not meet our tests that we have today. Sometimes I get a little concerned that there's a bit of testing going on here that I think is inappropriate. Again, there are three caucuses, and I must say that these statements I make do not apply to all three caucuses.

So I just throw that out. If you want to have a discussion with respect to this, we can certainly have one, but my preference would be that I'd just throw it out to you, you study it, you review it, and perhaps at the next meeting if we want to pursue something more definitive with respect to expenditure guidelines, we can do so. Okay to bring it back? A preference? Okay.

The next one, then, arising out of the minutes was a request that we take a look at caucus office funding. We do a comparative across the country. We make some statements of a philosophic nature with respect to caucuses, their purposes and the like. So what you've got is a document. Again, the overview is there. There are some statements with respect to the roles and functions of a caucus, to the typical caucus office expenditures and the funding principles that we would have with respect to it, to the comparison of other jurisdictions' funding models.

I think that under section C there seem to be common elements that are basically identified across the country. Number 1 is that there should be an "allocation of funding on a per Member basis that recognizes the need to support individual Members in their parliamentary role;" secondly, an "allocation of additional funding for the Leader(s) of recognized parties . . . to support their parliamentary role over and above the individual Member amount." The third bullet is "separation of funding into clerical and research components" recognizing that, then "built-in mechanisms . . . to address inflationary cost fluctuations." We have that in Alberta. Not all jurisdictions do. A base amount for each of the various caucuses over and above whatever else is in place: we do not have a base amount in Alberta.

Under D, caucus funding models, again you could do those four things. Then you take a look at the summary, which is the comparative sheet and appendix A. You'll see the history that we have here

in Alberta under Appendix A going back to 1995-1996, but we have another flow sheet that goes back to 1985.

Mr. Clerk, do you have that sheet?

Dr. McNeil: That was distributed.

The Chair: Oh, it has been distributed. So you've got the other one as well.

We were putting this paper together. It basically goes back to a 20-year historical comparison. This is the Alberta one. It goes right back to 1986-1987. What we basically have in Alberta is a per member amount, and then we have a leader's allowance that's allocated to recognized parties. In addition to that, the Official Opposition gets an amount for a caucus office outside of Edmonton and Calgary. There is the record that you basically have over the last 20 years in the province of Alberta.

The last sheet that you have in there is a flow sheet from across the country that does a comparative with Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Manitoba, the House of Commons, the Yukon, and Quebec. As an example, if you look at the first item, it says, "Base Funding – A lump sum amount provided to each caucus equally." Alberta and B.C. do not have a base funding component. In Ontario they do have a base funding component. In Saskatchewan they do. In New Brunswick, Manitoba, the House of Commons, the Yukon, yes, and you can see the numbers that they would have in each of those jurisdictions.

Then in addition to that, there's a per member funding, "an amount provided to the caucus for each private Member to be used for clerical and research [purposes]." In Alberta the amount per private member, with the allocation we made mid-year in 2005, is \$58,000, not \$57,000; in B.C. it's \$67,900; Ontario, \$45,774; then you see Saskatchewan at \$24,700; New Brunswick, \$18,000; Manitoba at \$2,417; House of Commons, \$46,850; and the Yukon at \$29,360.

1:20

In some jurisdictions in addition to the amount per private member they also provide an amount per Executive Council member to the government caucus. You have the situation in Alberta that that is not done; in B.C. it is. The government caucus in British Columbia, in addition to getting the private member allocation, also gets an additional amount of \$33,952 for each Executive Council member. In Ontario that number would be exactly the same as for the private member, so they also account for Executive Council members. In the other jurisdictions there's nothing under that. Of course, the Speakers are exempted in all jurisdictions.

For additional opposition funding, in Alberta and B.C. the number is zero. There's nothing further to that \$58,000 or \$67,900. In Ontario there's an additional \$17,500, and that's the only jurisdiction in the country that has that one.

Leader funding for the Official Opposition in Alberta is \$400,000. In British Columbia it's zero dollars, although it is \$240,000 for the leader's office. In Ontario it's \$255,000 for the Leader of the Official Opposition. In Saskatchewan it's \$144,721; in New Brunswick, \$177,000; Manitoba, \$35,000. The House of Commons one is included in the bigger number that they have above. The Yukon is \$35,792.

We don't have anything over and above that for the leader's office. In Ontario they call it the leader's office rather than the Official Opposition. You can see the numbers going across. There's basically nothing in any other jurisdiction other than Ottawa.

The third-party leader funding in Alberta is \$200,000. In B.C. they don't have one, so it's zero dollars at the moment. In Ontario

it's the same as the Leader of the Official Opposition: \$255,000. In Saskatchewan it's \$72,361; New Brunswick, \$127,000; and it's zero dollars for the other ones other than the Canadian House of Commons.

Additional caucus office: only Alberta has that. The Official Opposition here has that \$63,000 a year for the Calgary office.

Nonrecognized caucuses get zero dollars.

Then the question is: what's the comparative for automatic adjustments for inflation? We have it, B.C. has it, Ontario has it, Saskatchewan has it. New Brunswick does not. Manitoba follows a COLA. The House of Commons, no; Yukon, no; Quebec, no.

When you add these numbers up and do a division by the numbers, the total average funding per member, basically, if you count the caucus dollars and the like, is \$69,431 in Alberta; \$64,046 in B.C.; \$71,128 in Ontario; Saskatchewan, \$37,523; New Brunswick, \$46,162; Manitoba, \$9,917; the House of Commons, \$53,658; and the Yukon, \$44,717.

The other numbers are just there for the benefit of having more knowledge in terms of how many elected members these jurisdictions have, the population of the jurisdiction, and the population per member.

That's the comparative. We can leave it here and come back to this when we discuss caucus budgets under the budget per se, or we can have a discussion with respect to this if anybody has any questions. Should we come back to it later, then, in caucus? Okay. Thank you very much.

The other business came out of the caucus furniture project. We've really got a fancy document for you here with respect to this. We also have a sample room on the main floor of this building. Some of you may have had a chance to go to the sample room, where the furniture has been assembled. There is a work plan in here which follows through on what we talked about earlier this year and exactly where we're at, and that's the plan we're following.

You can see on page 3 that we reviewed and assessed the existing furniture in all caucus offices. That's done. We developed a standard MLA office. That's done. People have been around talking to various people and various chiefs of staff and others. That's been completed. We've got a mock-up that's basically completed. We will start dealing with this and implementing it on a need basis.

There are a large number of members, of course, who are quite satisfied with what they have and will want no changes or anything else. But here's the plan, and it becomes simply an implementation plan, an identification of the greatest needs.

I don't really know from my own perspective where we are on this today, Mr. Clerk. If there is a work plan as to which offices or which MLAs we're dealing with and in what sequential basis, you can share that with the group, but I don't have that in front of me.

Dr. McNeil: We've been working with the chiefs of staff to identify the priorities within each caucus. My understanding is that Scott Ellis and Dan Dunlop have worked with the caucus chiefs of staff to identify priorities for soft seating. Some members or their staff have taken a look at the mock-up office and are going to make a determination as to what they want in terms of colour and what kind of setup in terms of either a couch and chairs or a work table and chairs. So that's in process now.

The Chair: Well, this is the plan for 83. I recognize and we recognize that it will not be required by 83. The dollar numbers that you have in here are the maximum on the basis of 83, but from our perspective we won't be expending anywhere near what we've got in here on the plan going out. Probably the biggest take-up will be in the first year, and I think it will decrease dramatically after that.

Mr. McFarland: I hope you take this as a positive, constructive thing. I talked to a couple of people who have looked at the chairs, and they just wondered if what I would call a visitor's chair is really going to stand up. A couple of opinions were that if you had a bigger person, it might not be quite the size of chair that might be conducive, and it appeared that maybe they wouldn't have a long shelf life. So when you're selecting suppliers, if you have any choices, could you keep that in mind?

The Chair: Agreed.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks.

The Chair: Cindy, did you have a comment?

Mrs. Ady: My only question is that this plan handles the office itself. I agree with you: I don't think all members will want to change. That's a good thing. I'm wondering about those areas outside the offices, you know, those reception areas that also have pretty tired looking stuff out there. Are we looking at that? Is it part of the plan, or does that come in after we get all the offices finished?

The Chair: Well, I don't have an inventory in front of me that anybody said that there's a bunch of tired furniture there. It seems to me that after we go with this, there'll be some surplus furniture left over in current MLAs' offices that might be very, very good, that might just replace some of the other tired furniture.

Mrs. Ady: So that's the plan?

The Chair: Yeah. That's the plan. We're not going out on a massive furniture-buying spree.

Mrs. Ady: I understand. Thank you.

The Chair: I just about fell out of this ergonomically correct chair.

An Hon. Member: Careful.

The Chair: Yeah. Careful is right.

An Hon. Member: You maybe need some padding.

The Chair: Yeah. I don't know. But it looks pretty. Again, the showroom is downstairs in this building.

Okay. There's nothing further, then, on that one. That basically covers those three items.

Then under New Business we have the proposal. It's the other binder you have, the 2006-2007 budget. If you look at the overview, we start off with the parameters that we put in in building this budget. I'll quickly go through those parameters and do an overview of it, and then we can stop and deal with it in a more specific way.

First of all, the operational costs that are used in building this budget are 3.5 per cent, which is the inflationary factor. The Alberta CPI September '04 to September '05 is 3.5 per cent. The source we use is the monthly economic review. There should be a little green tab, I think, that you can flip right to the page, where you can see all this documentation in here. The consumer price index, which goes September to September, for Alberta for all items is 3.5 per cent. That's the figure that we have used by definition in building the operational side, so that's consistent with what it is.

1:30

The second principle is the LAO branch manpower adjustments. There's a 4 per cent public service scale in-range adjustment. Those are in-range adjustments. When people arrive at so many years in service, they qualify to go to the next range. The guideline there is 4 per cent in the public service. Then there's a 3 per cent public service market adjustment and consequent increase in other things that go with the Legislative Assembly Office. So those are the two numbers: the in-range adjustment of 4 per cent and the public service adjustment of 3 per cent. That's the second principle.

The third one is the member remuneration adjustments. This is for the elected people, the elected MLAs. The factor we use is the average weekly earnings index of Alberta workers in the previous calendar year. If you want to look at the last page in that section of background, you will see the average weekly earnings index, that anyone can pull off from Statistics Canada at a certain day each month. That number shows that for 2005 we will arrive at 4.49 per cent difference.

Now, I want to keep reminding everybody that we still have three months of documentation that has to come in here. Those three months, the last quarter of each year, generally tend to sustain what has occurred by September. In fact, in some years it even goes beyond that. We're putting it on this day, early December, 2005 – this is the most recent information we have – that it will kick in at 4.49 per cent. We will not know the actual figure until the last day of March 2006. So I have to come to you and ask you to approve the recommendation that we have in here. I think last year we had put in our budget 3.25 per cent, and it was actually 3.17 per cent. We don't expend those dollars. They lapse, and they go back into the general revenue fund of the province of Alberta.

That's where we're at today. We'll know in January the October number. In February we'll know the November number. In March we'll know the December number. That's what it seems to be cooking out to and what our guess is at this point in time. Over the years it's been very, very close to what we've put in the budget. They're saying 4.49 per cent, and I'm asking to put in the budget 4.50 per cent. It presumably won't vary very much. So that's in there as the principle.

The caucus budget adjustments that we've built into this budget are based on the operational costs of 3.5 per cent. We'll come back to that.

The constituency services element of the members' services allowance. There's a 3.5 per cent budgeted increase to office operations to accommodate inflationary factors. So that base that we started off with, \$20,000, because of the change that we made in 2005, will at the end of this year show \$21,135. Then there's a 7 per cent increase to the staffing element to accommodate in-range and market adjustments. We said that that's what we would use as a principle. That would go to \$57,513.

The communications element is adjusted to reflect the number of electors as at March 2005 plus the penny increase in domestic mail. The formula will now read \$1.02.

The promotional element, based again on the most recent number, will move from \$2,271 to \$2,500. That's based on that little subelement you have there on promotions for constituency office allocations.

The matrix element is the same as the operational costs: 3.5 per cent.

The transition allowance is being held stationary again. This is not increased, holding it at \$4.2 million.

For budgeting purposes we're using 85 sessional days. Remember that in our budget we go April 1 through to March 31, so we count the days from April 1. We would count those days that we used in

April and May and the days that we used in November. Who knows when we're coming back in February? If it's the early part of February, we're going to come pretty close to that number. If it's the latter part of March, well, then we won't come close to that number, so those dollars will just lapse and would be returned.

The RRSP allowance per member, announced some time ago, for 2006-2007 will be \$9,000. We've had that little allocation for the Fort McMurray allowance. It only applies to one person, the constituency assistant. Public servants who work in Fort McMurray get a bonus under the Alberta public service system.

The next one, the vehicle rentals and taxis: it's the same, the \$900 thing.

The extraordinary temporary residence allowance: I'm recommending \$150. It was \$130, and this had not been changed in five or six years. We changed it earlier for those special 10 days mid-2005 and looked at the inflationary numbers for the last five or six years. You round it off to \$150 a day, which is what it amounts to.

A proposed MLA kilometre rate would move to 36 cents per kilometre. We try to keep it within 7 cents of the public service rate, and my understanding is that the public service rate is 43 cents per kilometre, so 7 cents less than 43 gives you 36.

Support of satellite constituency offices: the same amount basically has been budgeted. Now, when we had our meeting in June, we went through a document that basically said the constituency office employees. We had a document that was presented to us, and we all agreed that one of the things that we have to do is make sure that there's some harmony and some equity among all of the constituency office assistants in Alberta. These are the people who work in our constituency offices outside of the central core here in Edmonton.

We came up with a new matrix. We came up with a new system of allocating and evaluating so that there was some equity across the whole province. You've heard me say this before: I believe that these people should have every benefit that every other worker in the province of Alberta is entitled to. It's not simply good enough to put somebody on a contract and say: well, it's a contract with no benefits. That's very important, I think, in terms of human resources. So all the staff benefits we'll put on one separate line to identify this whereas in the past it's been in each of these 83 constituency offices. So that's what it amounts to. Basically, it's \$1.411 million divided by 83 to break it down.

The next item we've already agreed to. Sorry, no. That's sessional and nonsessional temporary allowance. Again, that's the one I just talked about a little earlier. It will move from \$130 to \$150 if you agree.

The next one deals with funds just to continue programs that we have. The photocopier equipment: again, we're budgeting 30 offices at \$2,280 an office to keep in that three-year rotation. Security systems in offices: 30 offices, again, to keep it updated, at \$1,000 per office is \$30,000. These are constituency offices. Again, just to complete the repair, the replacement, the moves.

The next one is the replacement program for furniture in the Legislature offices, the 4(c) item we talked about a little earlier. So we're budgeting \$210,000 for phase 2 of the program.

We're getting an increase from risk management and insurance. They're telling us that our fee will go up to \$137,366.

Funding has been included for the proposed select special committee of the Personal Information Protection Act review and the Chief Electoral Officer review. We get that information from the various select committees that we have. I believe that I just got a memo here today from one of the chairmen of the select committees saying that they needed \$20,000 less than we have in our budget. We'll come back to that when we come to those offices.

Funding is included for various projects to be conducted throughout 2006 that recognize and celebrate the centennial of the first sitting of the Alberta Legislative Assembly on March 15, 2006, and the creation of the Legislature Library. The overall funding has gone down in this segment. We finished the 2005 expenditures. So you'll see in that particular little portfolio that there is a reduction, I think, of over \$300,000 to deal with 2006 events as opposed to 2005 events because they're behind us now. We're going to have fewer conferences that we're hosting on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 2006 than 2005, so there's a reduction in that area of the budget as well.

That is an overview.

1:40

I'm going to go on for just a brief section further. If you go to the tab before tab 1, there is a large flow-through sheet which shows you the variances in each of these various things, again, just to break it down, then, into these smaller units. For financial management administrative services you can see the 2006-2007 request. You can see the budget for 2005-2006. You can see the variance. You can see that these human resources components take up the vast majority of this all. Eighty per cent of this Legislative Assembly of Alberta organization-plus is manpower related, so there have been very significant increases to all manpower in the last two years. It's been put in there, and you can see those variances.

Human resources. You can see again the breakdown.

The office of the Speaker. Once again, included in the office of the Speaker is the 4.5 per cent budgeted for allocation of a stipend. The Legislature Library: you can see those footnoted as well, and you've had that. House services: once again you can see the human resources component of the whole amount.

Information technology services. You can see the variances there as well. But in this one – and we'll come back to this when we go to it – the request being made from members for newer equipment, better equipment, more integrated equipment is pretty costly, so you can see that the bulk of the expenditure increase in that area is actually for the technical side.

Legislature committees. You can see that that's red, so there's a reduction in there.

MLA administration. Again, it's those footnotes 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. They basically deal simply with what I overviewed a little earlier in terms of the changes in the expense-related thing. The caucus item, again, is based on the 3.5 per cent for that number.

So you've got total expenditures, total revenues, and net expenditures. You can see the bottom line in there, and you can see the amount of the variance from one year to the next and see that it's essentially, well, 70 per cent-plus manpower related.

There's one thing in here that I would draw your attention to. The fiscal pressure contingency last year, where we had an amount of some \$900,000 for the fiscal pressure: that's all been built into the budget. So there's no call this year for a fiscal pressure because we now know what the public service contract negotiation has been and is for 2006-2007. A year ago we said that we weren't sure what it was, so we put it on a separate line, and when we found out, we had it applied. Well, now we know what it is, so it's already built in there for next year. That accounts, basically, for the variances in the human resources side. A previous sheet to that then shows you the whole flow on a smaller basis.

I will stop now, if there are any overview questions, before we go into each of the tabs.

Mr. McFarland: I missed it, and I apologize. The sector that has already settled then: that's what was referenced earlier here at 4 per cent and 3 per cent?

The Chair: Well, there's a variety of settlements. Overall, if you're union, there's one; if your non-union, there's another. There's management; there's WAS. There's opted out; there's opted in. But overall you're looking at 4 per cent plus 3 per cent; you're looking at 7 per cent minimum. There are some special cases for other people because they're special.

Mr. McFarland: Right. But that's a two-year agreement?

Mr. Ellis: I'm not sure if it's two or three. I don't know.

Mrs. Scarlett: The bargaining was for three.

The Chair: Three years?

Mr. Ellis: Three years. Thanks, Cheryl.

The Chair: Okay. Dave.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, under MLA administration, if I'm reading it correctly, I take it that probably the single biggest component in the variance and the human resources component is the decision to undertake the paying of the benefits to constituency office staff.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Taylor: Okay.

The Chair: And when we come to tab 8, you'll see that it's about – well, it's more than two-thirds of the total. More than that.

Mr. Backs: Under the Legislature Library, Mr. Chairman, in the variance summary, you have item 7 on the centennial books, and I don't see anything on that in the Legislature Library tab when we get to it. What's happening with that, and is there going to be spending in the next year on the centennial books?

The Chair: I'll bring you up to date. In fact, why don't I bring you up to date on all of that right now. The year 2005 was the 100th anniversary of the province of Alberta. March 15, 2006, will be the 100th anniversary of the first parliament in Alberta. So the government, for the most part, took the initiatives with respect to the 100th anniversary of Alberta, but the Legislature Assembly will take the initiatives with whatever modest things we do in 2006 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the development of democracy in Alberta. For the last four or five years there have been a whole series of things that we've been doing. Let me just very, very briefly bring you up to date.

Number one. You know those plaques that all of you get after you're elected for serving a term in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta? Now, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Backs don't know what I'm talking about because they haven't finished one term. They usually come at the end of a term. There's a historic plaque. So what we've done is a complete composite of every person that has ever been elected to the Legislature in Alberta, nearly 800 of them, going back to 1905, and we've had some artists create big panels that are, oh, about the size of one of those panels on the wall behind you. We've done a minimum of 25 dealing with each of the Legislatures in the province of Alberta plus a series of historical ones prior to 1905 and the province of Alberta, going back to the North-West Territories. That is one project. They came in at about \$5,000 to \$8,000 to

\$10,000 a panel. And we were doing okay until one of the people working on the panels passed away a couple years ago, which set us back a little while, but we're essentially complete.

So now where are we going to put them? The plan is – you know, when you walk to the Legislature Building, when you get to the big underpass and you go through the first series of doors and the second series of doors, and then you go up that little incline, and you've got all that cement stuff chiselled out, well, I want to name that hallway the members' way and have those 30-plus panels put in there as part of the overview, visitations to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. There's enough room in there to continue probably for another 50 more years. So we're also thinking ahead. That's project number one.

Mr. Martin: We won't have to oversee that.

The Chair: No, we're not going to oversee that. I can assure you of that.

That project is essentially complete. It's just wrapped, waiting for a time to announce it.

A second project is the creation of five books, which have been under authorship for going on four years. One book will be a coffee-table type of book. What we did is we went to a public competition and hired a photographer to come and visit the building and take 150 to 200 photos of the building and the rooms in the building and everything about it. Then we put together a really nice text: again, the history of Alberta, the history of this building, the history of this province for 100 years. We're into the final stages of the final writing of the text. This book should be ready to be published no later than March of 2006, and we'll probably be looking at a run of about 5,000. That's a single one.

The next one is a series of four books. Each book is in the neighbourhood of 500 to 600 pages in length. Very, very scholarly done. Extremely well done. One book is on the Premiers of the province of Alberta, going back even to the first Premier. The second book is on the Lieutenant Governors of the province of Alberta. The third book is on the Speakers of the province of Alberta. The fourth book is on the elected members of the province of Alberta. We've had four different teams of authors. These are groups now, not just one person. People are brought in to do certain segments of it and to put it all together, and it's all being co-ordinated internally by the Legislature Library. We're not incurring any great authorship costs of having to buy, you know – I think we had hired one PhD or two PhDs along the way and historians to basically deal with it. It is, again, extremely well done, very, very well footnoted. One book is basically ready to go to print.

Dr. McNeil: It's being printed now.

The Chair: It's being printed now, the second one very, very quickly, a third one very, very quickly, and a fourth one very, very quickly.

1:50

The plan, basically, is to look at May of 2006. I want to set up a 12-month schedule to do a whole series of things, to basically unveil those. We'll be looking again at a run of 5,000. The hope will be that all Members of the Legislative Assembly will want to co-operate with us because we'll have a set for each library in the province of Alberta, and we'll be sending them off to each MLA saying: do you want to deliver them to each library that you have in your constituency? So it'll be a chance to do that as well.

Again, we've paid for a lot of that stuff. We've paid for it in the

last two years, in the current year, so there's not a great draw for next year because we are now concluding those projects. The first one was the plaques. The second one was the second book, and 3, 4, 5, 6 were the four other books.

The seventh one. There are nearly 800 MLAs in Alberta that have ever been elected, and this is a commemoration of the elected democracy. We've created a series of special medallions, three and a quarter inches in size – they're that big – one for each of the 25 Legislatures of Alberta. So if a member served in one Legislature, not only current members but going right back to 1905 because we're going to find their descendants, they're going to get one of these medallions, which has historical data for each of the 25. If you've served eight terms, you will get eight medallions, which weigh about 30 pounds. We've commissioned wooden boxes for the various sizes we need of each of the medallions that individuals will get. Again, that's nearly 800 different members that have been elected to this Assembly. Everything is being done in Alberta, and they're coming in rather reasonably.

In fact, I didn't give you the number for the book, which will blow your head. What's our final blocked-in number for each of those books?

Dr. McNeil: Oh, gosh, about \$20.

The Chair: Yeah. About 20 bucks a book, which is quite remarkable, absolutely remarkable for the quality. It's being published here in Edmonton, again through a competition.

The medallions are going to be there as well, and we're going to track down the descendants of every one of the 800. Those I hope to have ready for the dinner that we want to have on March 15, 2006. We've invited every past member – you've all been advised to set aside March 15 in your calendar for you and your accompaniment – and all the spouses of deceased members. We've reserved the hotel, and I've given until January 15 or 16 for all people to indicate exactly how many, what the final number will be. So we'll have this dinner. There's one Lieutenant Governor, one previous Lieutenant Governor, one Premier, and two previous Premiers. They'll be given a role to play in the gala dinner. That's part of the plan as well.

So just back it up. We hope by the end of January to do something with the Department of Education. We've been working on this one for nearly three years. Nearly a third of a million dollars has been invested in an interactive CD for children. It is of incredible quality. We have not paid for it under any of our budgets; Education has. It's a joint venture with us to come up in 2006.

Basically, what it will be is that a child, an adult anywhere puts it in their computer and they can, first of all, configure who they are. If their hair is red, they'll see a child come up, and if they want to press the button, the hair can go red. If they like to wear sweaters, they can press the button, and they'll have a sweater on that child. Then they'll go for a walk through the Legislature Building of Alberta. As they enter the foyer, they will see the water. If they want to close the water, I think they can press the button, and the water will shut off. Then if they want to turn to their right, they will see – is that where the Indian maiden is or Queen Victoria is?

Dr. McNeil: Princess Caroline.

The Chair: Princess Caroline. They can see right up, and the quality is just like the real thing. They can press on Princess Caroline, and they will get a historical vignette, or she may even talk to them. Then they can walk through the whole building, go everywhere. They can walk down a hallway where somebody's

office is. Whose office is that? They can click the button, and it's this person's office or that person's. An image may show up, or if we get as far as we want to go with it, we may even have a talk back and forth. I want to do that with all 83 Members of the Legislative Assembly. So if your constituent wants to basically see who you are, you can pop up and the like.

Now, this is an educational tool. It's being developed by Alberta Education. The base started at the long-distance educational facility. As I said, this has been nearly a year and a half to two years working on it. The final touches are being done by a creative group out of Ottawa. The stuff that we've seen to this day is just outstanding.

As an example, if you want to find historical events in Alberta, there's a section in there on the great debate that the Social Credit government had in 1935 about the bills to curb the media, whatever those bills were called. The government of the day basically said that the media were out of hand and that they had to be controlled, so there was a great debate. There's a section in there where the child can become the newspaper reporter. You can press buttons, and you can see vignettes of headline stories from Alberta newspapers at that time, part of the debate, and there's a section in there where the child can actually write an editorial and other kinds of examples like that. It is top notch.

In the latter part of January with the Minister of Education we want to basically say: here's where we're at. They paid for the bulk of it. I think there's one section in here, \$15,000 or \$20,000, where we want to just add in one of our budgets here to go forward with that.

What we want to do on Family Day in February. Do you remember that last year during the 100th anniversary of Alberta there were great big banners on the grounds of the Legislature in a purplish colour that basically talked about the royal visit? What I want to do is have banners put on the grounds of the Legislature, in the front and at the back: 100 years of the Premiers of Alberta and 100 years of the Speakers of Alberta. But there's one Premier and there's one Speaker who will not get a banner. It's the current Premier and the current Speaker. We're doing this from an historical point of view. Those banners are actually very, very cheap. That would be part of a Family Day initiative in terms of the commemoration.

In March I want to have that dinner and at that dinner bring all the former MLAs back. We're going to do some things on the Wednesday morning for previous members in recognition of who they are, and I want to unveil the first book, the coffee-table book, and do the medallions.

In April . . .

Dr. McNeil: The other books.

The Chair: That's May. I'm still in April. There's something else we're doing in April. I can't remember what it was.

In early May there is a possibility that the Governor General will be coming to visit us. I'm not supposed to be telling you this, okay? Cross my heart. Sure. There'll be some other plans, in fact the possibility of even inviting the Governor General to speak to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The time that we would have our normal spring tea in the Legislature Library is the time we would want to unveil the other four books, the package of books, so that there's time in May and June for MLAs to distribute and visit libraries if they want to do that.

In July and in August as well the focus will be on visitations to the Legislature.

In September we had another project, and I can't remember what it was.

We've also tried to make contact with all of the former pages, whoever has been a page in the history of Alberta – and that is no mean task, let me tell you – and have a dinner for them in November and finish the year with some more activities like that.

Many of them are not high-cost elements. Dan, that was a long way of getting around to answer your question, to basically say that most of it has already been funded.

Mr. Ducharme: If I could just get clarification in regard to March 15. I'm hoping that there have been discussions with all of our respective House leaders for that dinner that evening, that maybe we postpone the evening session.

2:00

The Chair: I have contacted the Government House Leader and asked him to contact the other House leaders, and he sent back a note to me saying that that's an okay thing, I think.

Mr. Martin: There's a meeting on Friday morning.

The Chair: I'm going with the dinner anyway because we're going to run out of time. If the House sits, well . . .

The Premier has already agreed to come. So has the Lieutenant Governor.

Mrs. Jablonski: I just have a comment to make about one of the things you said. This is the first time I've heard anything about all these things that you are doing.

The Chair: That's not true. I've talked about it previously.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, about the banners that are going to hang outside. We're celebrating 100 years of the government of this province of Alberta, so my question to you is: the present Premier and the present Speaker have been part of that 100 years, so why would you leave them out of those banners?

The Chair: Well, no. No. I'm not prepared to stand up and be criticized from a vanity point of view, and I know that the current Premier isn't either.

Mrs. Jablonski: But they are a part of the 100 years of this history.

The Chair: He and I would agree that we don't want one.

Mr. Martin: You can't make them do it.

The Chair: That pretty much sums it up.

All in all, when this stuff comes through, it's going to look pretty neat, and the 83 MLAs are focal to it. Oh, and we've got a new logo. We've got the 2005 logo for this year, but all the letterhead that we'll be publishing under the LAO will have a new logo as we hit 2006, called the 100 years of democracy.

Mrs. Ady: Do we get to pick the picture that's going in the book?

The Chair: It's your official picture.

Mrs. Ady: From what year?

The Chair: You know, it's pretty clinical. We'd be here for a year and a half trying to figure out pictures. We'll just delete that.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Chairman, I presume that the pop-up tour of the Legislature would have a Q and A session with the Speaker.

The Chair: Well, part of it will be an introduction, but it depends how sophisticated we can get with this technology. What we want to do is get a base done and then develop it and keep improving it. But I want it to be interactive with members so that your constituent can actually do something with you.

Mr. McFarland: With respect, Mr. Chairman, I would tend to agree with Mary Anne that, politics aside, even if a banner of the current Speaker and the current Premier were not up at the start of the year, I do believe that it would be most fitting at least to have it up towards the end of the year. I think that would be one time when Members' Services could overrule the Speaker and when MLAs could overrule the Premier too.

The Chair: Let's see what the banners look like first before we come back to that. Now we're dealing with the history. That's what I want to do.

Mr. McFarland: In fairness, though, I think I am the fifth MLA in our riding, and you know that in cities there are a huge number of them – yourself, you've been serving government or a government employee in the past for many, many years – and I don't think it takes away at all whether you've represented a goodly amount of time or whether you've represented a very short period of time. I think that Mr. Taylor would agree that if he's entitled to be in a book, and rightly so, as an MLA, Speakers are no different.

The Chair: Well, I'll be in a book, but I just won't be in a banner. Ray, did you have a comment?

Mr. Martin: Well, there just seem to be some things that perhaps we as MLAs should know about. There are deadlines. Could we get sort of an itinerary of the things that we're expected to do and when and that?

The Chair: Yes. I was planning on doing that in the latter part of January. I can tell you that a book has gone to the publisher, but if something happens, you're dealing with a deadline that I really can't confirm. That's why we have to get some deadlines for some planning, like we're going to go with the dinner kind of thing. You can't send hundreds and hundreds of letters out. We'll go all over the map with that. There are a number of other things we're throwing around, but maybe that's enough for today.

Mr. Knight: Agreed.

The Chair: Well, we do have a budget that I would really appreciate your consideration of. If I take you to that first tab, it's called Financial Management and Administrative Services. Okay. We've already given you a brief overview. There's a request there for \$103,000 increase over last year's approved estimate; \$83,000 goes to the human resource expenses, the public service in-range and market adjustments, \$21,000 to continued development of the Legislative Assembly's information and records management, and we get a thousand bucks in revenue. So there's your sheet that basically talks about the whole thing for that little overview.

By the way, should we just proceed to go through all of this and stop at each tab if you have some questions? Then you can decide the direction you want to give at the end, one vote kind of thing rather than a vote on every line. Agreed? Okay. Thank you.

The second one, the human resources area. Seven employees in that area. The total request is for \$87,000 earnings, contributions, allowances and supplements. That's it. That is based on the response and the reaction of that particular budget. All other micronumbers are in there.

Morale, by the way, is very, very good. I'm really, really pleased that a large number of you allowed your constituency office people to come to that seminar we had last week and to have your constituency office people attend the LAO recognition dinner, which was probably the most enthusiastic one we've ever had.

The next one is the office of the Speaker, and I know that this one will take careful attention. The increase, again, is based on a \$46,000 total office increase: \$35,000 of that accrues to the human resource side in earnings and employer contributions including, if it's 4.5 per cent for the Speaker, an amount of \$3,000. We've got an increase in here for office administration and supplies, and it has to do simply with the amount of letters and mail-outs that I've been doing with respect to the 100th anniversary. I just had a mail-out to all former members the other day, and I think it was a couple of bucks just for each envelope and the stuff that went into it. There's your microbudget as well.

The Legislature Library. This one is staff intensive. There are 16.3 manpower in there, and again you can see the dollar request in there. The Legislature Library branch requests a total increase of \$319,000 over last year. Two-thirds of that is the manpower one, and there's \$102,000 dealing with the costs of library materials. I think our library has to be as proactive and as up to date as any library. Period. It's the best source of information, I do believe, for all of you. But the conversion to the digital side seems to have a cost attachment to it. Then, again, we can see the micronumbers associated with that.

House services. This is the one that basically has a \$5.7 million budget, and we're asking for a \$110,000 increase simply because we've had reductions in this area. You can see that there's a reduction of \$271,000 dealing with Alberta centennial projects. I said that there was a decrease in the number of conferences, so that's been reduced – but we took that out – by \$57,000. So, again, it's the manpower side with the reductions that we have.

The information technology services one. This is the one where we continue to have good working relationships with your IT people in each of your caucuses, and we tend to be driven directly by what members want and what members need in this area. Of a \$426,000 increase over last year \$93,000 is human resources, and the other \$333,000 is related to upkeep of the infrastructure, the development needs, and the hardware, the software, and the licensing costs associated with this one area. It doesn't seem to want to go down.

Legislature committees. Again, these are the expenditure requests of the various committees. Now, I received a memo here today – where is that? – of the budgetary estimates from the committee clerk. Mr. Clerk, do you not have this? The Legislative Offices confirms – I guess, Mr. Ducharme, you're a member of that committee?

2:10

Mr. Ducharme: Correct.

The Chair: Yeah. So yesterday, I guess, that committee met. They want \$121,000. Okay, that's fair. Public Accounts budgeted \$21,000. Special Select Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee. Where is the Chief Electoral Officer? Okay. They don't have that in there.

Mr. Knight: Yeah, it's here.

The Chair: Oh, \$63,000.

Dr. McNeil: It was reduced to \$45,000.

The Chair: It says that your forecast for 2005-2006 was reduced from \$63,200 to \$45,200, and the budget estimate for 2006-2007 was approved, but I don't have the number. Is that the \$4,000?

Dr. McNeil: That's the \$4,000.

The Chair: Okay, so we're fine. It's just that they're going to lapse some money in there. Okay.

So that's a review of that. That is reduced from last year as a result of the completion of some of that committee work.

The MLA administration budget, which includes, of course, basically all of the constituency office elements and the like plus a few others, shows, you can see, that the constituency office staff benefits funding is \$1,411,000 as a result of that request.

On the next page over the constituency office staffing – that's their actual staffing salaries – is \$372,000 because of the large numbers we have. So that basically is, again, two-thirds of the MLA administration budget.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, could I take you back to the committees and get a bit of an explanation as to why the Legislative Offices estimate has gone up from \$81,000 to \$121,000 in the coming fiscal year?

The Chair: The Legislative Offices Committee. All I have here is what Mrs. Tarchuk has sent me. You would have some members in your caucus on that committee. I don't know who's on that committee. Somebody in here must be on that committee.

Mr. Ducharme: Yeah. Ms Blakeman. Laurie Blakeman.

The Chair: Okay. Do you know why that budget went up, David?

Dr. McNeil: The increases relate to two factors. One is an increase in the cost of an external auditor to audit the office of the Auditor General of \$3,000, and the cost of hiring a human resource consultant to audit the positions of the Assembly officers is estimated at \$40,000.

The Chair: Oh, yes. That's right. We made that decision to hire somebody to do that.

Mr. McFarland: To do an audit?

The Chair: I don't know. We're putting in the budget what the committees are asking us to put in.

Dr. McNeil: The Auditor General's office is audited by an external auditor, so the estimated cost of that process has gone up by \$3,000 for next year.

Mr. Ducharme: If I can add to that, basically the Auditor General's office gets audited by an external firm on an annual basis. When you look into the costs as to what a firm does it for, they probably do it more for reputation rather than factors in regard to what the costs would actually be. It's not an exorbitant amount of dollars that they charge for that audit.

Mrs. Ady: Could I go to tab 8? I think that's where we were. We went back. Are we done with the officers? I just had a question.

When we met earlier – and I can't remember which month it was in – we talked about having a look or a scan at the differential in how much constituency offices are now costing. Would it be under tab 8?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Ady: Did we see that differential? I know that at the time of election in Calgary we were finding office prices to be quite a bit higher than other regions in the province and running upwards. I'm wondering if that pressure is reflected in the budget or if the scan is there.

The Chair: It is.

Mrs. Ady: It is in there as well. Okay. Are we going to see some kind of differential?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah.

Mrs. Ady: Okay. Thank you.

Oh, I have one other question on tab 8. Sorry. Are wages and benefits for constituency assistants included in this tab?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Ady: You talked about this idea. By the way, I'm supportive of constituency assistants receiving benefit packages, you know. I think that's appropriate. But my question for you is: as we look at individual MLAs who have some control over what happens in that arena, if the salaries are already set at a certain place contractually and now they pick up these benefit packages, are we adding additional budget for them to do that? Are they going to have to go in and renegotiate those contracts now? I'm worried about if a particular constituency has said, "I'm going to pay X," and now we're going to say, "We want you to pay benefits as well." What will happen in those instances?

The Chair: Well, remember that the document that we agreed to last June, which is the one that I will be instructing Cheryl Scarlett, our director of human resources, to provide more paper on to all members between now and March, basically categorized three groupings from entry level to more mature level to fully mature level constituency office assistant. The intent there would be to have that that be the range. Nobody would go outside of those. There's lots of flexibility within each of the three ranges, so when you get to the maximum, well, okay, that will be the maximum. We will always be adjusting the maximum as time goes on if there's inflation or COLA adjustments or the like.

The benefits, basically, are found in another line associated with it, but they would be very consistent. We want to have a consistent package. We don't want to have somebody way out there in left field and somebody else just in an entirely different situation.

Mrs. Ady: Okay. My concern is that you're going to have somebody that maybe valued their assistant, and so they paid them X, and now they've got to pick up benefits too. Is that in their budget?

The Chair: Well, then there's a real problem. The intent is to try and make sure that constituency office people, because they are not in Edmonton and because they are out there everywhere in the field, are not forgotten, to try and make sure that they are viewed as valuable participants in this process. That means that all of the 83 Members of the Legislative Assembly have to want to buy into the

clause. We then have to recognize that this is service that needs to be rewarded. Also, there's a high expectation for the service too. If there's a high expectation, then the reward would come.

Mr. Knight: If I might, Mr. Chairman, I believe that most of that is laid out in the information that we've been – it's there.

Dr. McNeil: The cost of the benefits would be paid from the central budget in MLA administration as opposed to the constituency office budgets.

Mrs. Ady: That's what I was looking for. Thank you.

Dr. McNeil: That, I think, relieves that concern. It should relieve that concern anyway.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, are we asking general questions now, or do you want to move on?

The Chair: No. How about if I just go through them all, and then we can stop? This is the overview anyway.

Does anybody have any more questions on tab 9, Government Members?

Well, okay. The next three. What we built in was that 3.5 per cent operational number. That's what you have, and then rounded off, it goes to \$60,000. So for the government one it's 37 times \$60,000. For the Official Opposition it's 16 times \$60,000, the leader's office allowance, and the Calgary caucus office the bottom line. For the third party, the ND opposition, it's private members, four times \$60,000, and the leader's office allowance the bottom line. For the single independent member it's one member times \$60,000. That's where we were at. Of course, we have no vacancies.

There in an overview is the whole budget. Now I'll stop, and we can have a discussion on any subject.

Mr. Knight.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to take you back, if I could, to tab 1. An answer to a question that I have probably runs through most of the first half a dozen sections anyway. It's to do with the employer contribution levels in each one of these areas. I would suggest that if you look on page – well, it says 1 of 1, but it's actually the second page in financial management. If you look at earnings and employer contributions, there's about, give or take, a 30 per cent uptake, and I think that's normal across almost any industry. My question is: why would that, then, not be relative in a percentage?

2:20

When you go to page 1, they ask in the earnings area for \$43,000 and a contributions increase of \$33,000. The percentage is way out of line. Then if you go to, you know, human resource services, the earnings are \$61,000 and contributions are \$23,000, so you're at about that 30 per cent level. If you go to the Speaker's office, earnings \$17,000, and they ask for employer contributions of \$15,000. That's almost 100 per cent. I'm just wondering what has changed. In the Speaker's office the general earnings are \$252,000 and contributions of \$76,000. Again you're at about 30 per cent. I just wondered why in this particular year the contributions with respect to employer contributions have increased that much.

The Chair: In the last two years there have been incredible increases in the public sector of Alberta.

Dr. McNeil: Generally speaking, the contribution rates have gone

up across the board. Those particular lines are derived from a formula. Employment insurance is 2.62 per cent of the salaries. CPP is 4.9 per cent. Group life insurance is 3.5 per cent.

The Chair: What's the first one?

Dr. McNeil: Employment insurance.

The Chair: How much is it?

Dr. McNeil: It's 2.62 per cent of salaries.

The Chair: What's the second one?

Dr. McNeil: The Canada pension plan is 4.95 per cent. Group life is 3.5 per cent.

The Chair: Okay. Go on.

Dr. McNeil: The management pension is 18 per cent. The nonmanagement pension is almost 9 per cent, 8.81 per cent. The dental plan is \$84 a month. Alberta health care is \$44 a month. Blue Cross is \$58 a month. All we're doing is applying those formulas to the salaries that are there, and that's the number we come up with.

Cheryl may be able to add to this.

The Chair: Cheryl, do you want to deal with – okay, take human resources.

Mrs. Scarlett: Just a couple other general comments. In terms of the macro that David was referring to, in some branches, dependent upon the classifications, some are participants in the management pension plan. Some are in the opted-out, excluded pension plan. There are different contribution rates for those. The management pension plan has a higher contribution rate. So that's why you would see some differences in some of those budgets. Also, part of that formula includes a reference to the health benefits and entitlements. In some budgets there are wage dollars, where those people are sessional and do not participate, and others where all the staff in those do participate.

The Chair: Is it also true that in this budget for 2006-2007, as opposed to the current one, we don't have a fiscal contingency as a bottom line underneath? It's already been built in because we know what the contracts are for next year, whereas last year we did not know what they were, so we kept them on a separate line and then applied them. That would have bumped it too. We don't have that special line.

Mr. Knight: It's not the year to year. It's the department to department thing. I think I've pretty much received an answer there, although some of the numbers just strike you as being odd.

The Chair: Look as well at the numbers of people you're talking about. You're talking about 10, four, seven. If you have a manager in one or a manager in two, it will make a difference. See who they are.

Mr. Martin: Just a general comment. You've gone through and explained, you know, the costs, and a lot of it in the various areas, as I understand it, had to do with staffing costs, benefits, salary adjustments, that sort of thing. If people just looked at the ranges, some of those departments would be 6 per cent, up to 7 per cent, in

that range of increase. The only general comment I'd make to that is that then when we go to the caucus budgets, it's straight across 3.5 per cent. The bulk of the money that we spend in the caucuses is still to deal with some of the same situations with salary adjustments and the rest of it. I was wondering why we were able to sort of put those adjustments in the other departments but not as part of the caucus.

The Chair: Because you don't want to let me. What I am doing is open and transparent, but your caucus budgets are not. You get one line. What you do within your own caucus budgets is you decide to do it among yourselves. I would love to do that. Then we'll go for a line in each caucus budget saying – but you don't want that to happen.

Mr. Martin: The point I'm making is that if it's to do these salary adjustments in other departments, you know, ranging from 6.5 to 17 – I understand what you're saying. It's just the one item. I think we all know that the bulk of what we do with caucuses is going to be staffing, and it's going to face the same sorts of pressures. That's the point I'm making.

The Chair: Agreed. We will tell you exactly what everybody here makes, but I don't know, we don't know, and nobody knows what you pay anybody. We've had situations in the past where some caucuses decided to pay somebody a hundred thousand plus a year. Nobody in the LAO ever made that. That was a choice they made at a particular time, and then they changed it later. This is where I go back to the original caucus guidelines that I'd like you all to take a look at to see if you want to get involved in them. How would you recommend we proceed?

Mr. Shariff: I know that a lot of the discussion we were having earlier on had to do with some draft recommendations. Are you expecting significant changes on this budget part? Can we vote on it today?

The Chair: My love would be that we would vote on it. Then we'd be that much further ahead and necessitate a lack of requirement to even have a further meeting.

Mr. Shariff: Then I move that we adopt the budget as proposed.

The Chair: Secunder?

Mr. Martin: Well, I have been asked to bring a motion forward.

The Chair: Okay. First of all, we'll get a seconder. Mr. Taylor. Moved by Mr. Shariff and seconded by Mr. Taylor. We've got a motion on the floor, so then we're wide open.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Hinman has asked me to bring forward a motion dealing with his budget. I have copies here that I'll hand around. This is just some information.

The Chair: Yeah. The motion is to support the budget. You're basically talking about an amendment to the budget to do something else, right?

Mr. Martin: That's correct, yes.

The Chair: Okay. That's what we're talking about. Go ahead.

Mr. Martin: Basically, there is some information that I'll just

quickly go through that the Alliance caucus gave me, but the motion is to move that

the Members' Services Committee allocate a leader's office allowance to the Alberta Alliance caucus in the amount of 25 per cent of the leader's office allowance for the Official Opposition for the remaining fiscal years of the 26th Legislature, beginning with 2006 and '07.

This is research, as I say, that has been done by their researcher, so I'll not take responsibility for it, but I take it that it's correct.

Basically, there are five points that they're making. The five points are, one, that special funding was set aside for the Representative Party in 1986 for their leader's office with only two members, they say, during a time when there was a relatively large opposition, as there is now: 16 NDP, four Liberals, and two Representative Party members.

Two, Gordon Kesler, WCC, and Grant Notley, NDP, both received funding greater than other MLAs as leaders of their respective single-member caucuses in 1982.

Three, the NDP in 1997 and 2001 received funding for their leader's office from the Members' Services Committee with two MLAs and during six months with only one MLA.

They point out what is now self-evident, that Paul Hinman is leader of the party as of November 19, 2005.

Then they end up with a quote from Rob Renner during a Members' Services meeting, April 30, 1997, where he says:

My understanding is that there is some precedent in this province when we do have a third party represented in opposition, and that precedence has been approximately half of what the opposition leader would receive. In fact I understand there is even precedent, should there be a fourth party, that they would receive . . . a quarter.

I pass that on, Mr. Chairman, for your consideration.

2:30

The Chair: Mr. Knight.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The comment that I would have to make with respect to this thing is that the understanding that I have is that each Legislature would deal with these matters as they see fit. We don't in this particular venue that we're in here concern ourselves with precedent. We don't actually have a precedent here. We're here as the 26th Legislature dealing with the issues that we see before us, and my opinion on it would be that any history that's taken place with respect to what other Legislatures have done doesn't carry any weight with what we're doing here today.

The Chair: Others who want to participate?

Well, you're closing the debate then, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. I guess so. Nobody else is jumping in.

Mr. Taylor: Did we have a seconder for this motion?

The Chair: Well, it was an amendment. So, okay, we'll go with that.

Mr. Martin: Well, I don't necessarily disagree with Mr. Knight, but you have to base it on something. Generally, the Legislature, with *Beauchesne* and everything else we do, is based somewhat on precedent. If you don't have some basis, then each session, every time we have a new Legislature, we're going to go through all these twists and turns and the rest of it. Obviously, we don't necessarily have to follow the 24th Legislature or whatever, but it's nice to have a basis when something has worked in the past. At least it's

something to touch base with. I would suggest that to some degree precedent is important.

The Chair: Okay. That's the discussion. Then we have an amendment to the motion. The amendment was moved by Mr. Martin, and there's no requirement for a seconder on the amendment. So all in favour of this amendment that you see in front of you? Opposed? It's defeated 5 to 3.

So on the main motion that Mr. Shiraz Shariff has – and it's been seconded by Mr. Taylor – shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Would all those in favour of the budget proposed by the Speaker, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Those opposed, please say no. So it's carried.

We have one business arising directly out of this budget proposal, and we have some constituency service orders that require a motion from the committee. Do we have them for circulation, please?

Ms Orydzuk: They've been circulated.

The Chair: Oh, they have been circulated. Okay.

The first one that you have in front of you would be MSC Order 10/05, that basically says that constituency service amendment order 15 would see the one clause with \$20,000 being struck out and going to \$20,420 and the other one going from \$50,000 to \$53,750. Would all those in favour please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Opposed, please say no. Okay. Thank you very much.

The second one basically has numbers again that relate to constituency services orders that would bring the numbers into effect on April 1, 2006. The previous one was December 14, but this one is April 1, 2006. All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Okay. That's 11/05.

The third one is MSC Order 12/05, and it would come into effect on April 1, 2006. All those in favour please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Opposed? [interjection] I'm calling the question. Is that okay? Is it unanimous?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah.

The Chair: Everybody agrees? Are we missing something?

Dr. McNeil: No.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

It's carried.

Then MSC Order 13/05. All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Opposed, please say no.

They're all carried, and they're all carried unanimously, so we'll assume that the Speaker moved it, and it was seconded, and it was done. Is Parliamentary Counsel going to offer caution with respect to this?

Mr. Reynolds: No.

The Chair: No. I didn't think so.

Okay. I said that there was one other thing that I would like to raise with you and to share with you. It sort of came after we dealt with this budget. Sure. Circulate that, please, David. I just want to have a discussion with you and see what you think about doing it because it is something that is a concern, and that has to do with residential alarm systems for Members of the Legislative Assembly. Members have come to me over the past period of time and basically said: "Hey, look; I'm away" – and everybody is in a different kind of a situation with a different kind of a family – "and my home is left unattended and it's vacant, and there are these people in my constituency who are quite concerned, and they've been, you know, threatening to do this." We all know this, and I'm not going to speak in a great way about these examples other than to say that you all know what I'm talking about because it happens, and it happens all the time.

The question basically is to look at some assistance with respect to an alarm monitoring situation that would have some validity for members when they're not about. Again, I don't want to talk about specific examples, but we all know what I'm talking about. If you'd like us to work on this – we've basically looked at this. We've had the Sergeant-at-Arms. We've had some security people come up with some suggestions for us. A number of members have basically said: we think this should be a part of what should be available. There is a recommendation. The recommendation is option 3. It says:

The LAO provides stipulated maximum reimbursements (purchase and installation maximum for each legislature and a monitoring annual maximum . . .) to each MLA for the specified purpose of the purchase and installation of a residential alarm system and monitoring fees. The MLA is responsible for contracting, installation and monitoring.

We don't really want to have this so that we're in charge or responsible for the whole darn thing, but if we can provide a service that helps individual members, depending on where they're at in the province of Alberta, it's something that we can consider.

I'm prepared to move forward on this, but I hadn't put anything in the budget for it or anything else. Maybe we don't even need anything if we have some lapses or the like. But if you think it's a decent thing to look at, I'm quite prepared to move it forward.

Mrs. Ady: Well, I've got to say that I've always felt really fortunate to be in office in Alberta and not feel under threat. I know that there are some countries where to be in political office is, you know, to put your life in danger, but if individual members are feeling that way or feel like they need those kinds of services, I think that it would be okay to give them that option. I don't know that all members would feel that way, but, I mean, if in particular some have some concerns, I think that they are doing public service. I don't think they or their families should have to be at threat at home. I think it's something that we should probably take a look at.

Mr. Knight: I could only, I guess, add to Mrs. Ady's comments there with respect to the issue. Of course, each of us has a different circumstance, but I know that from my own situation I would

certainly find that this would be beneficial. We do, of course, live in the country, albeit beside a very busy highway, and it's not unknown in the area who lives there.

The Chair: Or when you're away.

Mr. Knight: Or when you're away. It presents a very unique set of circumstances there.

The Chair: Yeah. If they see you on TV, they know you're not home, obviously, if you're sitting in the Legislature.

2:40

Mr. McFarland: Just another observation if I may, Mr. Chair. I'm not familiar with the alarm systems themselves, but there are some of us that live in rural areas that don't have access to private phone lines. If these work only with a private phone line . . . Probably it wouldn't impact very many, but I'm just going to give you a heads-up that it might.

The Chair: You don't have a private telephone line where you live?

Mr. McFarland: No.

The Chair: I thought we finished that program 10 years ago.

Mr. McFarland: Well, you don't understand.

The Chair: Obviously, I don't.

Mr. McFarland: There are some services that have a limitation. If it requires a second private line at the residence, the capability is not there. If it means having a phone line, that's one thing.

The Chair: Yeah. Those are technical matters, though, that we'd have to work on.

Mr. McFarland: It's just a heads-up. You may run into that. I'm not sure.

Mr. Taylor: Hook it up to the SuperNet.

Mr. McFarland: You can't get SuperNet on the farm, Dave. Sorry. We don't live in Calgary.

Mr. Taylor: I'm just pulling your leg.

Mr. McFarland: I know.

The Chair: But Mr. Ouellette is working on it. Okay. Go ahead, Denis.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly endorse this. I believe it should be an option that be available to our members. But I'd also ask you if it would be possible, maybe through the Sergeant-At-Arms – you know, a lot of MLAs may not have considered the safety situation with regard to their families. It might be good if the Sergeant-at-Arms could possibly provide something for the members for their consideration. Personally, I hadn't even thought about it until a retired RCMP staff sergeant basically asked me one day: have you and your family ever considered, you know, if different situations would occur in your home, that you have a plan in place? Really, I hadn't thought about it, but it's certainly something that,

you know, should be considered. I think if we can offer that type of information to our members, it would be beneficial to us all.

The Chair: Okay. That's enough for me. I think there's general consensus that if we can do something, we should do it. So we'll just proceed.

Mr. Knight: Right. I was just going to say: are we choosing an option then?

The Chair: No. I don't want you to micromanage. I just want your principle support: yes or nay. A highly sophisticated guy like the Sergeant-at-Arms is going to come up with all the reasons why it'll not work or will work.

Mrs. Ady: Big dogs.

An Hon. Member: Sergeant, do we get our choice of Doberman?

The Chair: Well, hopefully, nobody feels they need anything. Hopefully, the bottom line is that it's totally, totally not required.

Mr. Knight: This is a lot like the House. We sit down and shut up when the Speaker stands up. Works well.

The Chair: Other Business is number 6, Dr. Knight. Please, have at it.

Mr. Knight: I'm finished, but I thought perhaps you might want some discussion around the options because some of the options may be more palatable to us than others.

The Chair: Well, we'll figure out some kind of a positive solution, as we always do, with consultation.

Mr. Knight: Thank you.

The Chair: Is there other business that people would like to raise?

Well, with your support today for the budget proposal normally we would've had another meeting in early February. That probably is precluded, so can we just leave the next meeting at the call of the chair? If you feel that there are items you want raised, you can just bring them to our attention, and we'll bring you all together?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Have a wonderful, happy, safe, and joyous Christmas. Please remember that the sun will shine regardless if you are on a holiday or not, so take a holiday and get some rest. Okay?

Mr. Shariff: Are you telling us that you're going to a sunshine destination?

The Chair: No, but it doesn't mean that I can't lecture people to.

Thank you all very much for the meeting. We need a motion to adjourn. Mr. Knight and Mr. Ducharme, first and seconder.

Okay. Have we missed anything? Micheline?

Ms Orydzuk: I don't think so.

The Chair: We've got all the paperwork done? Rob? Shannon? We're okay? Okay. Adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 2:44 p.m.]