



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Thursday, January 9, 2025
9 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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

Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)*
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)**
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* substitution for Peter Singh

** substitution for Tany Yao

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9 a.m.

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[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, members. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

My name is Nathan Cooper. I'm the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the chair of this committee. I would now like to ask members and those joining us at the committee table to introduce themselves for the record. I will call on members joining the meeting remotely to introduce themselves after we have met those sitting at the table. I would also like to note for the record the following substitutions: Mr. Wiebe for Mr. Yao; hon. Mr. Hunter for Mr. Singh.

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

Mr. Getson: Shane Getson, MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, known as God's country.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

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

Mr. Langley: Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms.

Mr. Koning: Andrew Koning, Speaker's office.

Ms Bell: Lianne Bell, Speaker's office.

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

Mr. Joy: Darren Joy, Legislative Assembly Office, senior financial officer.

Dr. Ludwick: Dave Ludwick, corporate services.

Mr. Koenig: Good morning. Trafton Koenig, Law Clerk.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk.

Mr. Wiebe: Ron Wiebe, MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Dr. Metz: Luanne Metz, MLA for Calgary-Varsity.

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

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner.

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

The Chair: Thank you, all.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website.

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That brings us to item 2, the approval of the agenda. Are there any proposed additions or revisions to today's meeting?

Mr. Getson: Just one item, Mr. Chair. I'd like to bring up another item under other business, caucus expenditures.

The Chair: That's fine. We can do that under other business.

Seeing and hearing no other changes, I'd like to call the question. All those in favour of approving the agenda as distributed, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered.

That brings us to item 3, the approval of meeting minutes. Are there any amendments to the minutes from our last committee meeting, November 26, 2024?

If not, would a member move the approval of the minutes? Member Rowswell. Is there any discussion or amendments that need to be made? Seeing and hearing none, all in favour of approval of the minutes, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, that brings us to item 4, review of members' compensation, benefits, and allowances, item (a) report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee. Hon. members, the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee has provided the committee with its final report. In fulfillment of its mandate the subcommittee has reviewed the independent consultant report on members' compensation, benefits, and allowances and has made recommendations for consideration by this committee. I will note for the record that the report of the independent consultant has been attached to the subcommittee's report at the subcommittee's discretion.

At this time I'd like to entertain any comments, questions, or motions in relation to the report. And if I may be so bold, this isn't specific to any deliberation around the recommendations of the report but that we are accepting the report from the subcommittee to MSC. A potential motion might read something as follows, that

- (a) the members receive the final report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee,
- (b) direct the Legislative Assembly Office to post the report referred to in (a) to the committee's public website, and (c) direct the chair to table the report referred to in (a) for the record of the Legislative Assembly when the Legislative Assembly resumes sitting.

Is there any discussion on a motion, or would someone be prepared to move that motion?

Mr. Getson: I would be prepared to move it.

The Chair: Member Getson. Thank you.

The motion is now on the screen for the benefit of the members. I'll provide a moment.

Ms Gray: Just a comment to clarify. The report will include the report from the subcommittee, an appendix that is the consultant's independent report, and also the minority dissenting report that the Official Opposition submitted. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct. The minority report that the Official Opposition submitted, or members of the Official Opposition on this committee submitted, is included in the final report from the subcommittee that was posted to the internal committee website yesterday at approximately 4 p.m. That is the report that will be in its entirety provided on the external committee website and then tabled in the Assembly.

Are there any other questions with respect to the motion before the committee?

If not, I'm prepared to call the question. On the motion as proposed by Member Getson, all those in favour in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

Motion is carried and so ordered.

Item (b) of item 4 is deliberations. Hon. members, as the committee has now received the subcommittee's final report in relation to members' compensation, benefits, and allowances, we are now at a point where members can make comments and offer recommendations for the committee's consideration in relation to the review. I would note that the subcommittee's report provided three recommendations to the committee, and perhaps we might begin discussion on those three recommendations.

Recommendation 1 is a recommendation on the members' indemnity allowance, and I'd like to open the floor to any comments or motions in relation to recommendation 1, that addresses adjustments to the members' indemnity allowance. Mr. Getson.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I believe we submitted some items that were listed before for the table's consideration. I would like to have the first recommendation that is going to be

- (a) approve the recommendation in the final report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee with respect to the adjustment of the members' indemnity allowance and (b) direct Legislative Assembly Office to prepare a draft amending order to the members' allowances in accordance with clause (a).

The second item that I have for that is to approve the recommendation for the final report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee with respect to providing a transition allowance to members . . .

The Chair: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Getson: I apologize.

The Chair: Yeah. No problem. Each of these recommendations needs to be dealt with in isolation. As you know, the subcommittee made three recommendations. You just raised recommendation 1 with respect to the indemnity allowance for members. The committee clerk has put the recommendation on the screen as well as your proposed motion, which is to approve the recommendation in the final report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee with respect to the adjustment of members' indemnity allowance and to direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare the draft amendment orders to the members' allowances, but for the benefit of the committee the recommendation is on the screen. It's okay; we're just going to try to expand it a little bit.

9:10

With respect to item (b), which of Mr. Getson's motion is "direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare a draft amending order to the members' [services] allowances," it will take the Legislative Assembly Office some period of time. We will approve the actual order based on the recommendations here at the committee today. I would anticipate that in early February, maybe end of February, when we're all back together, we would then approve the orders that are the direction from what we provide them today.

That is the second part of that motion, but I don't have comments on the first half of the motion. If members of the committee would like to make comments.

Mr. Getson: If I could first put the explanation, I guess, since I kind of jumped ahead a little bit with the sense of expediency. The

proposed change to this would mean the members' salaries would be adjusted annually based on a percentage increase or decrease in the weighted average percentage of change in wage settlements for the public sector in Alberta, which is published by the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade and is updated essentially every month. The adjustments would be retroactive for 2025 and would be implemented on April 1, 2025. Yes, that is April Fool's Day. That always cracks me up when we do adjustments on April Fool's Day, but it is what it is. Each fiscal year would be adjusted on April 1 based on the most up-to-date published metric. The metric can be found under the bargaining update site. Again, it has the essence for transparency, it's tied to other bargaining agreements, and it's adjusted on an annual basis automatically.

The Chair: Are there other questions, comments with respect to Mr. Getson's motion on the recommendation? Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To be clear, the motion that is before this committee is to give MLAs a salary increase annually and for this year's increase to be retroactive to January 1. In the context of an ongoing and unprecedented affordability crisis that is hitting Albertans in every corner, I have to note that the Official Opposition did not support this at subcommittee. We have submitted a minority report dissenting, and I don't support the motion that Member Getson has put forward because I think every MLA has heard from constituents how much harder it is to get by now than it was six years ago.

We've seen the slowest wage growth, we've seen the highest unemployment, costs rising everywhere. Today education support workers are on the strike line in Fort McMurray, a group of workers who haven't seen an increase in a decade, who on average make \$34,000 a year, and who are working in deteriorating conditions because of the chronic underfunding in our education system with over 150-plus unfilled positions any given day. I think the context of what's happening in Alberta is really important when we talk about MLAs and our salaries and: should we be getting increases? I really think it's not appropriate for us to be granting ourselves higher pay and benefits at a time when Albertans are struggling through cost-of-living challenges.

As a final note, I will just say that minimum wage is the lowest in the country here in Alberta and hasn't been increased since the UCP government was formed: \$15 an hour, \$13 an hour for youth. In all of these contexts, that's the reason why the Official Opposition submitted a dissenting minority report, and I cannot support this. I also think that the majority of Albertans would not support MLA increases at this time.

Those are my opening comments, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Getson: A follow-up?

The Chair: Sure. I'll let Member Getson follow up to those remarks, and then we'll go to Mr. Sabir, who has raised his hand in the virtual room.

Mr. Getson: Perfect. Well, I appreciate it. Member Gray, we obviously take the affordability crisis very serious as well, but just a little edification for those that are following along at home. In 2009 the MLA wages were frozen. That's what our report had told us by the third party. In 2016 the MLAs, rightfully, took a 5 per cent wage rollback at that period in time. In 2019, where I was privileged for the first time to serve as a member, we voted unanimously for another 5 per cent wage rollback at that time. At that point it was under the auspices of balancing the budget, and we managed to do that three times in a row. Notwithstanding other collective bargaining agreements, those things, everyone is absolutely feeling a crunch on that. To understand where, if I was looking outward

and if I pulled up Glassdoor, as an example, for the wages that we receive as MLAs, I could be an associate criminal lawyer, I could be a red seal journeyman electrician, I could be a hearing aid specialist, I could be a super B class 1 operator. Those are the type of wage brackets that we're talking about here. So folks at home should know that it's not comparable to a federal item, you know, when you start looking at comparators there.

Again, we're in absolute agreement with you on the affordability crisis in those items, and that's what we're working on as an administration. But I think most people would understand that having your wage frozen for a number of years, you know, going almost 10 years, and having an additional 5 per cent, 10 per cent at this point, taken back, this is simply something that's reasonable. It's a reasonable bracket based on other collective bargaining and making sure that it's taken care of accordingly for the position of this office. Again, we put in a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, and I know that your members do as well, and this would account for an approximately 2.2 per cent increase given that we've already had those other items. I think the record should clearly indicate that as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Member Getson noted frozen wages, so I will start with other frozen wages, that is the minimum wage, that didn't go up since the UCP took office. We have asked for that, Albertans have asked for that, and at a time when we are seeing an affordability crisis, we are seeing an inflation crisis, I think this seems completely out of touch from what Albertans expect from their government, what Albertans deserve from their government. It's completely self-serving. Out of so many issues that we could have picked as legislators, MLA pay is on the top for UCP MLAs in particular, because we are not supporting this motion. There are so many other things. For instance, I hear in northeast Calgary every day about issues facing our school system. Kids are being bused to different quadrants, and the government of Alberta is funding education at the lowest in Canada. Now a recommendation is here from the majority of the committee, the UCP members' majority of the committee, that MLA pay should go up. I don't think that I can get behind that.

The Chair: Dr. Metz has indicated she would like to provide some comments, followed by Member Eggen, please.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much. I can't support this at a time when we've got this government changing fees, cutting fees to different groups as well. I agree with all of the comments of my colleagues Christina Gray – yes, we can use names here – and Irfan Sabir pointing out that due to affordability, apparently, the fees for things like childhood and senior eye exams where a follow-up is required are being cut, pharmacists have seen cuts, yet we're going to be increasing wages for MLAs. This doesn't sit right. We know there's an affordability crisis. The government can see that in trying to increase their own wages, but we are not recognizing that this hits all Albertans, and it is Albertans that are going to be paying for this.

The Chair: Member Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, have serious concerns about this motion to increase MLA salaries in the midst of probably what's the worst affordability crisis that Albertans have seen in several generations. I know as shadow minister of Advanced Education, for example, that an unprecedented amount of money has been taken out of our colleges, universities, and polytechnics,

not investing in the future of young people in particular in our workforce. You know, we had an opportunity in the last legislative session to address some of these affordability issues, but what this government chose to do instead was to pick fights with transgender people, to talk about sex ed, and not deal with affordability. Yet here we are at first opportunity to increase wages for MLAs, and this UCP caucus is all about increasing their own wages.

The responsibility of a government, number one, first and foremost, is to ensure the safety, the security, and the affordability of all persons that live in the jurisdiction. Albertans are not seeing that from this UCP government, but what they are seeing is self-serving increases to MLA wages.

9:20

The Chair: Thank you, Member Eggen.

Are there others wishing to – Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Just in reflecting on this change, I think there's another point that I need to make, and that is that the motion put before the committee is one that provides annual increases, and we saw when the temporary accommodation allowance was updated last November that that increase to MLAs was also given CPI indexing, so inflation-proofing. There's a pattern here of the government making sure that their entitlements and benefits are inflation-proofed and will continue to go up at a time that we've also seen the UCP government deindex critical supports for people on AISH, for seniors' benefits.

We just finished debating legislation, just this past fall, around deindexing and the impact that that has, and I just need to point out that while deindexing is on the table and has been used against the most vulnerable, here MLA wages will go up every year no matter – well, depending on what it's tied to, but most likely will go up every year. I've had the chance to look at the indicator that has been chosen. It looks like it's gone up every year for the past many years, so I expect that's likely to continue, but certainly it's tied there. I think we are seeing a pattern of behaviour that serves UCP members and their interests, and I think Member Sabir said it very well, that this is out of touch and not supported by the Alberta public.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question. Presupposing, I assume that you're going to want a recorded vote?

Ms Gray: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Let's move immediately to a recorded vote.

Hon. members, on the motion as proposed by Member Getson, all those in favour here in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us remotely, and if you can all turn your cameras on for this vote and then for the subsequent division, all in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

Can you also turn your camera on, Member Sabir, for the division?

Mr. Sabir: Yes. Sorry; I was trying to . . .

The Chair: That's okay.

A recorded vote has been requested by Member Gray. I will call each member here at the table to raise their hand, here in the room.

If you're in favour, please raise your hand. Member Getson, Member Rowswell, and Member Long. If you are opposed, please raise your hand. Member Gray.

I will call each member by name. Please indicate for or against. Member Wiebe.

Mr. Wiebe: Aye.

The Chair: Member Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: For.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Against.

The Chair: Member Metz.

Dr. Metz: Against.

The Chair: Member Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Against.

Mr. Roth: Mr. Speaker, total for the motion, five; total against, four.

The Chair:

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, that brings us to recommendation 2, that was specific to a recommendation with respect to a transition allowance. The subcommittee did make a recommendation, and I believe that recommendation will be coming to the screen momentarily, but is there anyone that would like to speak to this recommendation 2? Member Getson.

Mr. Getson: Sure. Well, we're off to a good start, Mr. Speaker. The approved recommendation: I think it'll be up on the screen here, so I'll just go into the explanation of it. The proposed change is that eligible members would be now entitled to a transitional allowance once a month per year of service up to a maximum of six months. This change recognizes that MLAs don't qualify for employment benefits, insurance, et cetera, or any of the other items that come with it. Currently, right now, there's a hard stop for years of service. There is no transition allowance.

It also recognizes that the Conflicts of Interest Act prevents former ministers from working for several months after leaving public office. Again, they are not allowed to earn after they leave office. The proposed transition allowance would include eligible members from the 31st Legislature. The formula would grant one month's pay per year up to a maximum of six months, and the payment of the allowance would be made on a monthly basis. The mechanisms that we're looking at here would be for members who were from the 30th sitting of the Legislature and who potentially are in the 31st sitting of the Legislature to be part of this. It would catch that up.

There were a couple of troubling, I guess, most recent notes in the media out there. A former member serving in Ontario, as an example, was found in a homeless shelter. Not saying that this is, you know, a cry for help by any means, but there are some hardships out there faced by your elected officials, believe it or not, while transitioning out.

Other jurisdictions have this. The report recommendation that came to us from the third party was upwards to 12 months, and we couldn't find our way to see that that was warranted, but we did see that there were a number of issues and challenges faced here by MLAs that would warrant the six months.

Members of the committee have taken a measured approach, guided by the recommendations and best practices of other comparable jurisdictions. We looked outwards across the country for that, and Alberta remains an outlier in MLA benefits, where we're the only province that is not eligible for a pension. This would not change. We are not making any recommendations for a pension for members or anything else. The transition allowance is short-term assistance to former members who are re-entering private life,

and it's common in most Canadian jurisdictions. MLAs in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are eligible to receive a transition allowance of up to 12 months, as that other external report had advised us, while members in B.C. are eligible up to 15 months. Again, just for the record we would be proposing something that would allow for a max at six months, and the calculation is based on years of service multiplied by one month over a monthly basis.

With that, I would open it up to other comments, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. So for clarity's sake, you're speaking directly to the recommendation that the subcommittee provided? And do you have a motion, or do you want – like, we can have some discussion around the recommendation, and then perhaps you can move a motion to accept that or otherwise.

Mr. Getson: Yep, that would be fine. Open it up for discussion, and then maybe we'll . . .

The Chair: That's fine. We can have some discussion about the recommendation. My sense is that Member Gray may have some feelings about it.

Ms Gray: Yeah, I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. But first I want to just ask a clarifying question. So we're not talking about the motion yet, but, Member Getson, I heard you refer to the 30th Legislature. Can you clarify your intent there?

Mr. Getson: Yeah, correct. The intent would be for those that were elected back to back, so the start for this would be the 30th sitting of the Legislature for those members who also are sitting in the 31st sitting of the Legislature.

If I use myself as an example, to make it very clear and abundant, my calculation, if I ran in the 30th, which I did and successfully served for four years there, and ran again for the 31st sitting and was successful there, if I were to not run again, be hit by a bus, not be elected subsequently in the 32nd sitting of the Legislature, then I would be, as an example, entitled to that calculation of one month per year of years served for that transitional allowance, up to a max of six months. Hopefully that helps.

9:30

The Chair: I'll go back to Member Gray, and then I have Member Sabir on the list, who will be next to speak after Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. We are talking about what is often referred to as a golden parachute, executive compensation, people getting a financial package at the end of their term. To be very clear, the recommendation that we received in the report by the independent consultant who reviewed member compensation, benefits, and allowances did recommend that it not recognize members' service prior to May 29, 2023. What we're currently discussing – there's no motion – is a change in an extension of what was recommended in this document.

Similar to what we just talked about with salaries, I think that there has been a lot of public discussion about Alberta MLAs and the compensation that they receive as they depart office. I'm very concerned that constituents are not going to be supportive of this. This was another item in our dissenting minority report that the Official Opposition said we would not support, and I am concerned, again, given the context of the affordability crisis that is happening and the challenges that my constituents and all Albertans are facing, that we are talking about not just this six-month payment at the end of service to a maximum of that six months but extending it backwards even.

I'll leave my comments there for now.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Member Gray, my colleague, noted, this recommendation is different from what was contained in the independent consultant report. Member Getson has used his service as an example to clarify this. I think our disagreement is, again, based on the same principle.

Some of the examples used were that some former member in Ontario was in a homeless shelter. I represent a kind of riding that is away from downtown. It's in the corner of Calgary, and never before have I seen homeless tents in this area. Now if you drive up McKnight Boulevard, that's a little bit off from my riding, we can see those tents there. If you drive into some parking lots, a Superstore parking lot, you will see those tents there.

Homelessness has risen sharply in the last few years. We have numbers from Edmonton. We have numbers from Calgary and elsewhere. I think using that example to, again, make a self-serving change to protect your own personal interest as a politician is not something we can get behind. If we are really concerned about homelessness – I think every Albertan deserves to have a place called home, and there are so many Albertans who don't have that as we speak now. So I don't think that I can get behind this.

The Chair: Dr. Metz has indicated that she would like to speak to the recommendation.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. I cannot support this recommendation. This is not something that the average Albertan has when they leave their job or are terminated from their job. While, of course, it's always a challenge as to how a person is going to move on and find a new position when they finish one job or another, we are electing, or should be electing, very skilled people, and I believe that the length of this gets to be a little bit out of keeping with what other Albertans have to live with. I do think that we should be considering that this is even longer than the consultant's report, so I do not support this.

The Chair: Are there others? Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Because of the potential change, my quick question to the LAO team that is here is: would you be able to – I'm trying to do the math – tell us how much the adjustment to include the 30th Legislature will cost in the budget given that every MLA will eventually retire or be retired?

Dr. Ludwick: MLA Gray, yes. We can do that math. We've, since the conversation came up here, been contemplating how to do the math. We would have to do some research to get the appropriate count of members who are current members but who had sitting in the 30th Legislature in order to do that math, but the math can be done. Yes.

Ms Gray: Okay. So, unfortunately, we'll have to make the decision here, assuming a motion is forthcoming, without knowing the cost to taxpayers and the LAO budget.

The Chair: Mr. Getson.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Just to be clear, too, for all those that are running spreadsheets off to the side, it hasn't changed in the contemplation. It would only be the MLA base salary. So in the scenario where an MLA also has an enhanced portfolio as being a minister, it would not be based on the ministerial or any other upticks. For myself as chief government whip, for the additional duties and delegations and items that I have to deal with in that arena, there is a modicum of compensation for that as well. That

would not be included. Again, it's only on base salaries of the MLA if you need to run any numbers over there.

The Chair: I wondered, Member Getson, if it is your intention to move a motion to contemplate those changes from the report, if you might be prepared to do that.

Mr. Getson: I would absolutely love to do that. Is it on the screen now?

The Chair: I think it's just been provided.

Mr. Getson: Okay.

The Chair: That's the recommendation. A motion would be slightly different to contemplate your recommendations. I believe it's on the screen now.

Mr. Getson: Chair, just to confirm, do you want me to read it into the record?

The Chair: Yeah. You know what? In this case I think it might be worth while reading into the record because it's a bit of a change.

Mr. Getson: Sure.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Getson: We'll see if my new glasses are working here, jumping back and forth, bifocals.

(a) approve the recommendation of the final report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee with respect to providing a transition allowance to a member serving on or after May 29, 2023, with the modification that the formula for determining the amount of the transition allowance to be paid to the eligible member must include any period of service by that eligible member on or after April 16, 2019, and (b) direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare a draft amending order to the members' allowances order in accordance with clause (a).

The Chair: For the benefit of the committee the second section of such a motion, of course, is to allow Parliamentary Counsel to actually draft the order, and that order will be approved in a subsequent meeting.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the recommendation or the motion that's now before the committee? Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the motion that's on the floor, if the LAO can come back with the costing to our next meeting, whenever that may be, I would like to know what this will cost Alberta taxpayers.

I just want to be clear. I do not support this increase to MLA benefits. The UCP majority on this committee has just passed an MLA salary increase that will impact this golden parachute, and given the context of the affordability crisis in our province at a time when Albertans are struggling through cost-of-living challenges, I cannot support this.

The Chair: Are there others on the motion or the recommendation?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question. Oh, Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to get into the queue and you called the question, but I will be really quick. It's kind of surprising that the committee is asked to pass something that has implications for taxpayers and even nobody on the government side, who is proposing this, knows what the cost will

be. That's kind of reckless, basically, and completely out of touch with what Albertans expect from a prudent government.

9:40

The Chair: Thank you, Member Sabir.

I will call the question here in the room. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us remotely, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Mr. Sabir: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested. Here in the room I will ask you to raise your hand accordingly, and when we go remotely, I'll ask you to indicate in favour or against.

All those in favour of the motion as proposed by Member Getson, please raise your hand: Member Getson, Member Rowswell, Member Long. Any opposed, please raise your hand: Member Gray. Joining us remotely.

Mr. Wiebe: In favour.

Mr. Hunter: In favour.

Mr. Sabir: Against.

Dr. Metz: Against.

Mr. Eggen: Against.

Mr. Roth: Mr. Speaker, total for the motion, five; total against, four.

The Chair:

The motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, that brings us to recommendation 3. I would like to open the floor for any comments or motions in relation to recommendation 3, that provides an additional \$6,000 to address financial pressures related to staffing and leases in constituency offices. Member Getson.

Mr. Getson: Sure. The rationale for this – and, again, the report was extremely handy in seeing some of the costs. We, obviously, consulted with other MLAs as well on our own as subcommittee members, I'm sure, just to see if some of the report findings were holding oil, as it were. I think all of us have seen pressures both in leasing costs and the staffing pressures as well. This is meant to address some of those items.

Again, it's one of the line items that form up the aggregate total of the whole constituency office. Again, to be clear, this is directly related to serving our constituents. It's making sure that they have someone there to pick up the phone when they need it. It's making sure that our staff – we can have decent staff to be able to do the heavy lifting in that work to deal with the ministries and represent our constituents. Obviously, you know, we're talking about affordability. We've all seen the affordability costs go up; for example, just heating these buildings, et cetera. We've all seen those pressures through the carbon tax, which, hopefully, will be defunct soon enough, that the opposition supported and propped up. We've seen those pressures increase year over year. This is to address some of those items.

The Chair: Would you like to make a recommendation, or would you be prepared to make a motion with respect to accepting the recommendation or not?

Mr. Getson: I absolutely would unless the other members wanted to talk. Yeah. Absolutely. We have that recommendation 3 for the

additional \$6,000 to the member's services allowance. The Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee recommended that the constituency services order be amended to adjust the portion – oh, here we go.

The Chair: Just a sec.

Mr. Getson: There's the motion.

The Chair: Okay.

(a) approve the recommendation in the final report of the Members' Compensation, Benefits and Allowances Review Subcommittee with respect to increasing the members' allowance by \$6,000 to address financial pressures related to staffing and constituency office lease costs, and (b) direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare a draft amending order to the constituency services order in accordance with the recommendation in clause (a).

Mr. Getson: That's exactly what I was thinking, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Any questions, comments, concerns with respect to the recommendation from the subcommittee or the motion as proposed by Member Getson? Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As noted in our dissenting minority report, this recommendation that the subcommittee made was not supported by the subcommittee members from the Official Opposition. The decisions and recommendations made by the UCP majority on the subcommittee across these three recommendations have no regard for the realities and the struggles of everyday Albertans, and we saw the reaction when the temporary accommodation allowance was increased at the end of last November.

Certainly, I think the Official Opposition believes it is not appropriate for MLAs to be granting themselves higher pay and benefits at a time when Albertans are struggling. And recognizing the leasing pressures, knowing that rent has been going up, that there have been inflationary pressures, that there have been insurance pressures, utility costs: these are things that all Alberta businesses are under these pressures, all of our constituents are under these pressures, and the Official Opposition sees that the government is moving quickly to resolve these issues for MLAs, but we are not seeing enough action on the insurance side.

As an aside, a plan to create a plan in two years that might reduce things but everything's going up first: very frustrating to see.

I cannot support this motion. The Official Opposition does not support this motion of \$6,000 additional to each MLA office at a time when the government has not been recognizing what is happening as far as affordability is concerned to businesses and constituents of our province.

The Chair: Are there others? Member Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I concur with Member Gray's analysis. It's interesting. I was just dealing with several issues in my constituency with individuals having their rents and other costs increased, and businesses as well that literally could not keep their heads above water because of increases to rent and ancillary costs just creating an affordability crisis, not just for individuals but for businesses and, in particular, a medical clinic that serves lots of people in my constituency, you know, really not being able to continue providing public health care because of these costs. So for us to swoop in and bail out constituency offices while Albertans are suffering is just completely tone deaf and flies in the face, again, of what I said before: our fundamental responsibility,

our first responsibility, which is to the people of Alberta and not just MLAs.

I think the UCP is not listening and is tone deaf on this, too, and I will not be supporting this motion.

The Chair: Are there others who would like to speak to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question. All those in favour here in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us remotely, those in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

A recorded division has been requested. We will conduct this division in the same manner in which we have conducted the previous two. Those in the room, please indicate if you are in favour by raising your hand. Member Getson, Member Rowswell, Member Long. Opposed, please raise your hand. Member Gray. Joining us remotely, Member Wiebe.

Mr. Wiebe: In favour.

The Chair: Member Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Aye.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Against.

The Chair: Dr. Metz.

Dr. Metz: Against.

The Chair: Member Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Opposed.

Mr. Roth: Mr. Speaker, total for the motion five; total against: four.

The Chair:

The motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, that brings us to item 5. Oh, sorry.

Ms Gray: May I offer additional comments on the report that is before the committee?

The Chair: Yeah.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because the report by the independent consultant is, with these decisions, now becoming public, the subcommittee recommended the salary increase for MLAs that will be annual, the new golden parachute that will be granted to MLAs going back to the 30th Legislature, the \$6,000 increase to constituencies that we've just passed.

9:50

I did want to note that one of the things that the subcommittee reviewed was the temporary residence allowance. Now, a motion was put forward on the temporary residence allowance at the end of November, so that's already been voted on by this committee. But given that the report is now public, I would like to make clear, just by reading the recommendation, that for the temporary living allowance the recommendation from the consultant was:

It is recommended that the Committee implement a modest adjustment to the Temporary Allowance Rate as of April 1, 2024. A rate adjustment in an amount up to \$205 of the existing base rate of \$193 per day could be considered (which is equivalent to \$2,050 per month, to a maximum of \$24,600 per year). This adjustment from \$193 to \$205 per day reflects an inflationary

increase of 6 per cent. Alternative adjustment rates reflect the following percentage increases . . .

And then the consultant provided a 5 per cent, 4 per cent, or 3 per cent option.

I read this into the record because at our November meeting the members of the government caucus put forward and supported a 14 per cent increase, more than double what the consultant had put forward. Instead of the recommendation of \$193 to \$205 we actually got an increase to \$350. Now that the consultant's recommendations are becoming public, given the opposition's objection to that increase at the time, I think it's just really important to note for the record that while Albertans were struggling with the cost of living, while rents were going up, not only did government MLAs give themselves a temporary residence allowance increase of 14 per cent, but it was far beyond what an independent consultant recommended: 6 per cent. I think that's really important to note.

It seems that at that point the UCP MLAs broke open the piggy bank, and now they are continuing to grab every penny with salary increases, golden parachutes, more money for constituencies, and, again, recommending far beyond what the independent consultant did. I will note they've essentially done that again in going beyond what the consultant recommended in extending the golden parachute backwards to the 2019 election instead of the recommended 2023 election.

As we on our agenda are considering the report, I do not have a motion because the temporary residence allowance has already been increased despite Official Opposition objections. But I really wanted to make the point that what the government did in November right before Christmas was well out of line with what the independent consultant recommended.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to speak to the report or otherwise? Member Getson.

Mr. Getson: Yeah, I feel compelled now. For the record the compensation for those that are getting a subsistence or a living-out allowance is intended to keep individuals whole. It's maxed out and it's capped at that; it doesn't mean they automatically get those items. It's only what they claim for, and the intent of that all along is to be kept whole, like every other item. Again, we need to make a little political hay while the sun shines, I guess is what the members are doing, and that's fine. But the record should also indicate for the items and changes we're making that they're not mandatory that you have to take them.

As an example, if your MSA that's allowed for your constituency office has money left over, you can return that. In my first year I think I returned about \$50,000. Then we saw COVID take place and we saw massive constraints and pushes on everything else. We needed heightened services provided to our constituents, and our budgets have been tighter and leaner. Again, I would challenge that if the opposition really wants to put their money where their mouth is, so to speak, you're not compelled to take any compensation packages. You're not compelled to take them. If you really want to pony up to the bar, then it's fully within your wheelhouse to not take them and turn them back to the public if you don't need them.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, it brings us to item 5 on the agenda, which is the 2025-2026 Legislative Assembly budget parameters.

Hon. members, as the committee has approved additional measures in relation to members' compensation, benefits, and allowances, the 2025-2026 Legislative Assembly budget parameters document that was approved on November 26, 2024, will need to be updated accordingly.

There's no requirement for a motion, but I am compelled to inform members of the committee that any decisions that the committee has undertaken today or will undertake today will be reflected in that budget parameters document, which will be circulated to members of the committee I would anticipate in the early parts of next week, if that seems like a reasonable timeline to my colleagues. That is just an item for information for you and for you to be alert and aware to the changes that that budget parameters document will make.

Then, of course, we will have an additional budget meeting in the subsequent weeks when the LAO has concluded the preparation of the 2025-26 Legislative Assembly budget, and we'll convene a meeting to approve or make changes to that at that time.

Unless anyone has any questions about item 5 – seeing none – that brings us to item 6. At the beginning of the meeting Member Getson indicated that he did have another item of business, and I will turn the floor over to him to speak to whatever that may be.

Mr. Getson: I do. Thank you for that, Mr. Chair. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair, I was trying to remember the room. It's always ingrained in me.

There was another item that kind of took us a little bit by surprise. We started looking at some crossjurisdictional analysis and essentially what it comes down to is the calculation for what caucus receives. The current calculation in the province is that only MLAs are counted for contributions towards caucus budgets. In other jurisdictions they have other calculations for those who may have ministries as well. To be clear, there's ministerial work. An MLA is elected for their constituents, then if so chosen to go to cabinet they have that portfolio. So they run the government part there, the cabinet ministers. They have a clear scope under the ministries of what's allowed for ministerial work. Then there's this part that also has to do with caucus work and also as MLAs.

We find ourselves in an interesting position where the MLAs for the UCP caucus are in a deficit position, a drastic deficit position compared to the opposition members. What that translates into is service that we can provide as MLAs back to our constituents and what work we can do and services we can provide to our members for caucus work as well.

What we're proposing here, looking at different jurisdictions, the one that seemed most reasonable that had contemplated this – and I think before in the past it may not have been such a difference because it was more one-sided, quite frankly, with the government calculations of who was in caucus and who had which side at that time.

I think right now is the first time we've seen that it's been such a balance between one Official Opposition and the government caucus members being the MLAs. We've seen, again, this deficit position. What we're proposing is to look at a calculation based on ministers being 50 per cent of what an MLA contribution back to caucus would be. What that does is it brings it up by looking at the rough numbers a little bit either on par or a little bit below of what the opposition caucus members now are afforded to do caucus work.

Again, we're looking at trying to fill that gap, that disparity, make sure that our constituents are obviously covered off to where they need, that caucus business can take place unhinged and make sure that it's balanced. This is what we believe is in the best interest of the democratic process, in the best interest of taxpayers and Albertans themselves.

I think I've caught everything there. That's what we'd likely be doing. The item would be to amend the budget funding model as per appendix A in the expenditure guidelines for caucuses of the Legislative Assembly effective April 1, 2025, to include members

of the Executive Council. Those would be the cabinet ministers at 50 per cent of the amount provided for each member for the purpose of research funding, general per-member funding, and to direct the legislative offices to revise the expenditure guidelines for the caucus of the Legislative Assembly in accordance with clause (a). I believe I've caught all the items that I didn't mention.

10:00

The Chair: Sorry, Member Getson. Were you able to provide the wording of that motion to the committee clerk? It looks like you have . . .

Mr. Getson: I believe so.

The Chair: . . . because he had it. Thank you.

Mr. Getson: Okay.

The Chair: But can you just confirm that the wording that is . . .

Mr. Getson: Maybe what I'll do, Mr. Chair, is I'll just read it right back in . . .

The Chair: Great.

Mr. Getson: . . . and make sure it's there.

Amend the caucus budget funding model at appendix A of the expenditure guidelines for caucuses of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective April 1, 2025, to include members of Executive Council at a rate of 50 per cent of the amount provided for each member for the purpose of research and funding and general per-member funding, and direct the Legislative Assembly Office to revise the expenditure guidelines for caucuses of the Legislative Assembly in accordance with clause (a).

Again, this is not party specific. Whomever has the configuration of the next sitting of the Legislative Assembly, so the 32nd sitting, as an example, would have this. So, again, it's contemplating that disparity that we've seen this last go-around.

The Chair: Questions, comments, concerns? Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This proposal is outrageous. The government only signalled to the Official Opposition that they might be considering this 48 hours ago. In your opening comments you said something else that took us by surprise: we did a crossjurisdictional analysis. To be very clear, the subcommittee was no part of that. There has been no negotiation. There's been no discussion. There's been no support from the Legislative Assembly Office. The Official Opposition does not have access to any crossjurisdictional analysis.

So the government and the government caucus did a little work off the side of their desks and have decided that they should get more caucus money. Now, you have only used the terminology of 50 per cent without explaining the financial impact and what this will cost to taxpayers and how much money this will give your caucus. Would you be prepared to share those numbers now?

Mr. Getson: Yeah, we sure can. If you just give me a moment, we'll have it submitted for the committee again.

And by no means, MLA Gray, Christina, did I suggest that this was something that was performed by the subcommittee or the committee, just for the record on that. I did not lead off with any of those comments. We did do this work off our desk, as you're suggesting, and it is to make sure that, quite frankly, I have the same horsepower that you do so we can keep it fair for all Albertans for the caucus work and for our constituents and what takes place. That's what the intent is. Regardless of who may sit on which side of the aisle at the time, I

think it is imperative that both caucuses – if there are two or three or four or however that works out – that the MLAs have the ability to do their jobs outside of that very constrained government office when they're cabinet ministers. There are a lot of things there that still need to be taken care of as an MLA and as a member of that caucus.

The Chair: Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you.

The Chair: And then, just after you respond, Christina, I do have Member Sabir and Member Eggen on the list.

Ms Gray: Okay.

The Chair: I'll go to them, and then we can come back to you if you have – you can go here, and then we'll come back to you if there's . . .

Ms Gray: Yeah, I absolutely have additional comments right now. The caucus budget funding was last adjusted through a subcommittee process that took multiple months. Ironically, there was a subcommittee that was already looking at expense adjustments, and then MLA Jason Nixon added this to the context. That the government is choosing to move this motion without providing any opportunity to explore this, to work with the LAO, for both caucuses to get briefed on what this means is absolutely unprecedented and completely unfair. The last time these adjustments were made, the opposition and government caucus were in agreement, and I believe that that's how it should be.

What Member Getson is putting forward, that this should be fair and that the two caucuses should have the same amount of money, is not how this works. That's not the expectation. The caucuses should receive the amount of money as per how the Alberta electorate has voted. How many MLAs do you have? You and your caucus had 60 MLAs prior to the 2023 election; you lost 11 MLAs. You now have 49 MLAs. And, if I am not mistaken, this move would give your caucus much more money than you had before. The Alberta electorate said: no; you are going to have a smaller caucus. You did not have the support of the people, you got a smaller mandate, and now you think that your caucus should have more money.

My napkin math just for the general per-member funding – I didn't realize you were also including the research funding – is at least a \$1.1 million increase to your caucus budget. That gives you a larger budget than you had as government last term. It is outrageous and does not make sense and does not match what came out of the last election.

You're referring to it as being most reasonable, doing the 50 per cent of MLA contributions. When we did, again because we had 48 hours' notice, a quick review of what happens in other jurisdictions, the other jurisdiction that does 50 per cent is B.C. The 50 per cent number we're talking about is \$4,000, not over \$50,000. So if you want to match B.C., do a \$4,000 top-up, not \$50,000. Trying to drive it by percentages completely distorts what's happening as far as this is concerned.

The government has resources. Executive Council MLAs are getting a chief of staff, press secretaries, a car, a higher salary, the machineries of government to support them. Executive Council members do not do private members' bills. I have been a minister. Member Sabir has been a minister. Member Eggen has been a minister. There are a number of resources taxpayers afford to the government, and that is a reason why they are excluded from the calculation for caucus budgets. So this, in my view, is an attempt by the government to double-dip.

I just think the comment by Member Getson that this is not party specific, when it is specifically advantaging the UCP today, is ironic. You are moving a motion to give your caucus more than a million dollars, at minimum a 25 per cent increase, and I am very frustrated that this hasn't been done through a subcommittee process where at the very least we could explore the reasons for this, where we could explore the impacts. Yeah. This is ridiculous.

Mr. Getson: I'd love to just get the numbers back for a response, Chair.

The Chair: On the numbers, sure.

Mr. Getson: Just throw me back on the speaking list.

The Chair: If you want to provide the numbers, that's a fine and reasonable thing to do. I think it's fair that immediately following that we go to the two individuals who are on the list. So with respect to the numbers, please provide them.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. And then, just to confirm, Chair, after the other two members preceding me on the list, I would be following?

The Chair: You bet.

Mr. Getson: Okay. Currently, right now, what we get for caucus is \$3,061,496. The opposition, which definitely gets more and utilizes their budget numbers, including to have their researchers drive out to remote communities, as an example mine, to sit there for two hours on end and try to get a 15-second clip so they can bomb me on social media: what they get for that type of service and work to their constituents is \$4.9 million, \$4,920,473. So we have a difference, essentially, of \$1.9 million currently that the NDP caucus can flex and do whatever they need to do for their service of their members.

The Chair: Member Eggen was first, followed by Member Sabir, and then Member Getson is back on the list. And there's a small chance that Member Gray would like to be on the list as well, I would expect. Member Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that Albertans are getting a very clear glimpse into how this UCP government really operates. What we're seeing is a series of ways by which they can enrich themselves, enrich their caucus, and, you know, tilt the rules in their favour. If the UCP was so concerned about this, they should have thought about it, I would say, when they were building their very bloated cabinet. I mean, they've never seen such a big cabinet, you know, present members of this Members' Services excepted, but otherwise, did they need to do that if they were thinking about caucus financing? I would beg to differ.

10:10

I think that, clearly, this is just another way to grab money, right? I know that their caucus, you know, does lots of political action in their caucus. They want to throw another million dollars, another 25 per cent increase, to their caucus in addition to a bloated cabinet, quite frankly. So I think, you know, for Albertans this should raise eyebrows. It's an instructive moment to see just how self-serving this UCP government really is.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A couple of things. One, I would like to see that crossjurisdictional report. If Member Getson would table that for the benefit of the committee, that would be great.

The second thing is that Member Getson said that they are getting less money and the opposition is getting more money, but, as Member Eggen said, the UCP chose to have a cabinet that's the biggest in the history of this province, and, as if that was not enough, then they put parliamentary secretaries there. They also get some extra money, it's my understanding. And with each cabinet minister you get a chief of staff, you get a deputy chief of staff, you get a press secretary, you get a couple of MAs to do casework, you get schedulers, you get call takers. Like, you're taken care of. And in so far as research needs are concerned, you're in government. You have government departments who have the data, who have the capacity to do that work.

I'm not sure what kind of work this million-plus dollars will do for them, because we have seen ads coming from the UCP. He was talking about a 30-second clip on social media. Ads are coming against our new leader, Nenshi, who's not even elected yet, and caucus money is being spent, UCP caucus money is being spent on those ads. So maybe Member Getson and the UCP caucus need to think and prioritize where they are spending their caucus money.

Again, we've been in deliberation for a long time. We didn't hear anything on these lines, and now they surprise us with this item without any kind of analysis, any kind of background information. The UCP is just asking: give us more money. We got paid, we got a housing allowance, we got a golden parachute, we got gift rules changes, we got FOIP rules changes. Now you cannot know who they are meeting, who they are getting gifts from, and now: give us another million-plus dollars, so that they can have a slush fund and use it as they see fit.

Again, I would really appreciate it if Member Getson can table the cross-jurisdictional analysis. I would be interested in seeing that.

The Chair: For the benefit of the committee members, the list that I currently have is that I had committed to Member Getson to be able to put him back on the list after he provided the additional information. I do have Member Gray again, followed by Member Metz and Member Hunter, depending, Christina, on if you want to go straight to Dr. Metz.

Ms Gray: I'll go after Dr. Metz.

The Chair: Okay. Member Getson to respond, followed by Dr. Metz and Mr. Hunter.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. We would commit to tabling the research that we did, absolutely get that to there.

To MLA Sabir's note, I'm not sure how you guys worked when you were in government, but I know that as a parliamentary secretary I get no bump. Essentially, what that role is to do is to help the business of the day that's taking place. A number of our MLAs have different acumen, different skill sets that are being utilized in those areas, but there is no additional compensation. It's additional work, and it's good work for the people, but there is no compensation there. If this proposed change were elected or moved forward by the subcommittee, you know, for the record, again, it's approximately \$500,000 more that the opposition caucus would still have over the work that we need to do for that.

To MLA Sabir's point on what we spend our caucus money on, I can make the commitment full well that if you stop slamming my leaders and going after my members, I won't mention that your leader currently is not elected and is one of the best friends of Justin Trudeau and still supports a carbon tax. If we want to start getting into that game of what we should do with our money and making people aware, yeah, I'm more than happy to have a sidebar conversation on how we spend that and what we do for those.

At current it's not just the advertising that we do. It's not just that. It's a ton of the research that has to be done. It's a ton of the work that supports the MLAs, and this is intended, regardless of which electoral cycle comes up, to try to make sure that there's a balance and not such a disparity. Again, we haven't seen this before. Again, I can't comment on how you guys ran it when you were in government, of where your lines between the ministries and caucus blurred or didn't blur, but ours are pretty definitive, and this is intended to make sure that we get the best service for the MLAs and for the folks that voted them in, who they represent.

With that, I'll just open it up to the last remarks.

The Chair: Dr. Metz, followed by Member Hunter and Member Gray.

Dr. Metz: Well, I think it's critically important that the UCP members recognize that the advantage they have in government is that all of the work around important issues to Albertans falls within some ministry. They have huge benefits on the research, on the communication, on the supports around all of that work whereas in the opposition all of the work that we do around anything – and I'll use health care as one example – has to be done by the caucus budget. We don't get any support in our caucus for shadow ministries, shadow ministry work, that's critically important. That all comes out of the caucus budget. There is a huge disparity, but it's in the opposite direction of the way that they are presenting this today.

I would say that if you're going to be looking at evening things up, there should be more that would support the important work looking at what is happening in the different ministries by shadow ministers. I think they're going in absolutely the wrong direction.

The Chair: Mr. Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Yeah. You can take me off. Shane Getson said what I wanted to say about the parliamentary secretaries not getting any pay.

The Chair: Okay.
Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you. A couple of really important points have been made. I want to repeat a couple, and I have a few new ones. First, Member Getson, the idea that the two caucuses should be funded equally to be fair is not how the caucus budget formula is supposed to work. The government lost 11 seats in the election, yet for some reason you think your caucus budget should be higher today than it was when you had 60 MLAs. That doesn't make sense. That's not what Albertans would expect.

Part of the reason that is happening is because with your 49 MLAs, you've made 25 of them ministers, who get additional pay, who get a car, who get a chief of staff, press secretary, multiple political staff in their offices, and the machinery of government supporting the work that they do on the government's agenda, and those resources do in turn benefit the caucus as the caucus gets briefings on the bills that are happening and access to more detailed information than the Official Opposition does.

Perhaps if the government is looking for more money, rather than going to the taxpayers and saying, "We should get an extra million-plus, maybe closer to \$2 million" – again, I'm looking for the numbers when someone has them. Perhaps instead of having 25 ministers here in Alberta, you should have 15, like Manitoba, and there would be 10 more. That would be almost a million dollars additional caucus funding, if you drop the cabinet size, without having to re-jig the formula and to tilt the playing field in your own favour. Or you could copy B.C., which has 16 ministers. But, no, this

government wants 25 ministers and wants their caucus to have more money than when they had 60 MLAs. It is absolutely ridiculous.

10:20

This caucus money that the government is looking to give themselves, really, we can consider a bit of a slush fund. The member has already referred to the types of advertising that we've seen from the UCP caucus. I've got a document here with a good summary of all of the Nenshi attack ads that the UCP caucus has chosen to spend their money on. So I'm very curious if the UCP caucus is looking for a million dollars because they are terrified of Naheed Nenshi, and they want more money to advertise against him because that's what they've been using their money for up until now. They have serious, serious priority issues at the moment.

I also am very curious. We've had no briefing from the LAO on this, but I always understood that the caucus funding formula excluding Executive Council was a continuation of the separation of powers between the legislative branch and the Executive Council. We've had no conversations about that. Why is the funding formula this way? How has it been this way?

Again, when we talk about B.C., who does 50 per cent and who, I believe, the government is trying to copy, in B.C. we're talking about \$2,000. Here in Alberta you're talking about more than \$50,000, so it's really no fair comparison whatsoever.

Asking Albertans to give over a million dollars, maybe closer to \$2 million of additional funds to the UCP caucus with insufficient notice, insufficient research and debate in a process that we've never seen before right after in the same meeting you raised MLA salaries, you reintroduced golden parachutes, you increased constituency office budgets, and we learned not only did you give yourselves higher rent at 14 per cent, but it was more than double what the independent consultant recommended: it's absolutely inappropriate, and it shows that the UCP members have lost the plot entirely.

Your government is starving our public education and public health care systems of vital funds. Your Premier is attending the inauguration of a foreign power who's threatening our very existence, and here you are taking more and more and more for yourselves. This is an absurd request, and I have been at committees like this one as an elected official for almost 10 years now. You should be red with embarrassment that you would even think to suggest this. This is a more than 25 per cent increase, allowing ministers to essentially double-dip, increasing the size of a slush fund that you use to attack Naheed Nenshi, and all because you claim that you're in a deficit position. The only reason you're in a deficit is because you haven't adjusted your spending to the fact that you lost 11 seats in the last election.

This is how the funding formula is supposed to work. It is supposed to be commensurate with what the Alberta public has chosen for their Legislature. And, yes, we are the largest Official Opposition in the history of this province. That does not mean it is unfair to you.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to provide additional comments, questions, or . . .

Mr. Getson: Just one follow-up.

The Chair: Member Getson.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. MLA Gray, I have a ton of respect for you and, you know, in my position, to put it on record, I think you should have been the leader of the Official Opposition fold through and through.

So \$1.1 million to try to keep things that your caucus has a \$500,000 upper hand is by no means anything of us being scared of Naheed Nenshi. I mean, I recently had comments, and you talked about it and you brought it up, about the integration and the work that we do with the United States, our largest trading partner south of the border. We absolutely have seen a national gap that you can see with Trudeau falling on his own sword sort of, and he even stumbled at the podium with his own papers to do his exit swan dive. But your leader, again, didn't understand the significance of the border issues or the amount that fentanyl could kill people. So, no, not really scared of somebody who's unelected and doing that.

Again, my arguments – we may disagree on how you look at this, and I can see why you're so adamant against this, because levelling the playing field is something, of course, that I think, if I were in your position, I would be very scared of. We've managed to work with a deficit budget, compared to what you've had for the last two years. We're doing that.

But, again, to do the work of the people, to make sure our MLAs are well represented is what we're looking for. Again, we're going to have differing opinions on that, but to suggest that this is something we're looking at because we're scared of your unelected, incoming leader: no. That's not the case at all.

The Chair: Are there others?

Ms Gray: Levelling the playing field when you are the government and you have access to 25 ministers, all of the political staff that come with that, the machinery of government, the research, the work – the executive members don't do private members' bills, which the Official Opposition and other private members do. The premise you are putting forward, that our two caucuses should have the same budget because the largest Official Opposition in Alberta's history has been elected, does not make sense.

We have done no analysis on how this could impact future Legislatures when the makeup of the Legislature adjusts. You could be tilting the playing field permanently in favour of government caucuses forevermore, and I suspect that this is going to cost a lot of money. Again, we haven't heard the official numbers. Is it possible? Does the LAO know? Did the staff who support the work of this committee have any notice that this motion was coming? Do we have any information about what impact this might have to budgets?

Mr. Getson: If I can . . .

The Chair: Sure, Member Getson. Go ahead.

Mr. Getson: Again, specifically to the numbers, we currently are at \$3,061,496. We are looking for an increase of \$1,161,473.50. That would bring us to a value of \$4,472,983.50. At current the NDP has \$4,920,473, so \$4.9 million, almost \$5 million is what the NDP currently has at their disposal for caucus.

Ms Gray: Can I just check in on that? When this was signalled that this might be coming, 48 hours ago, I did 25 times half of the general funding per member, which is \$46,452, and from that I got \$1.161 million, which is the number you just gave me, but your motion also includes research funding. I think the research funding is particularly ridiculous given that government ministers have access to their own departments. They do not do private members' bills. That particular piece is additionally outrageous, but would that not also include an extra \$10,000 per minister, so \$10,000 times 25 on top of the numbers you've given me?

Mr. Getson: That's not the intent. The intent is to take what the value is – real quick math on the back of the napkin here. Take the value of the MLA, divide that by half, and multiply it by the ministers. That would be it.

Ms Gray: Okay. But the math you've just given me does that only for general funding per member. It doesn't include research funding, and your motion includes both research funding and general per-member funding. This is why we shouldn't be doing things like this, more than a million-dollar impact, spontaneously at committee without doing the background work. I don't think your math is right.

Mr. Getson: We can compare, but we'll go with the motion as written because that's the intent. The intent, again, was to have half of the value of the MLA's allocations, and then, of course, it goes to research funding, and that's capped at \$1,177,391. So, again, we would provide our items, our math, and our calculations all to the committee.

Ms Gray: After the decision is made, which is ridiculous and completely frustrating and counter to how a government should be operating in every sense of the word.

Here we are. I think your math is potentially wrong. I'm happy to be proven wrong, but you can't because we don't have anything in front of us. We've had no crossjurisdictional information. We've had no briefings from the LAO, who is here to help support this, and this will impact the budget for the LAO and taxpayer dollars.

At the same time, if I might add, here we are. The government caucus is asking for a million dollars. At the same time the legislative offices were just in front of their committee, and most of the legislative offices got cuts. They did not get the money they needed to fund the pressures they are under to the tune of \$500,000 here, a million dollars there.

10:30

At the same time senior eye exams have been cut, deindexing of Alberta seniors' benefits. Yesterday we heard that the Calgary Disability Action Hall and the Edmonton Self-Advocacy Federation, self-advocacy groups for disabled Albertans, have been cut. I realize that that was a government decision, but the context is you have a government that is cutting things everywhere, and now you want to give your caucus a more than 25 per cent increase.

This is ridiculous, self-serving, double-dipping, and creating a giant slush fund that gets used to attack Naheed Nenshi. The arguments that this is reasonable or mirrored off of other jurisdictions are patently false from the information that I've been able to find in the insufficient amount of time that we have been given, and the premise that the two caucuses should have the same budget is false. That's not how this is supposed to work. You get funding for the MLAs that you elect, and then Executive Council should be separate. You're changing the paradigm in a permanent way without us understanding the impacts, and it's only because the UCP caucus wants to have more money. This is the worst kind of decision-making. This is self-serving to your caucus, and I am so frustrated that we don't even have the adequate information to know what the costs are going to be.

We've got bad numbers, bad reasoning, and a bad decision that's going to cost taxpayers.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Member Christina Gray mentioned that we are asked to make a decision without any information, without any analysis, without, I guess, numbers of

what it means for taxpayers. They relied on crossjurisdictional analysis. I think that's a word that gets used and abused very often.

I think I would ask government members if they would be willing to park this debate and bring back some independent analysis from the LAO or the independent consultant, bring back the interjurisdictional scan, and then talk about it with, I guess, more information and needed information. If members of the UCP caucus are willing, I can move a motion to that effect as well.

The Chair: As you know, Member Sabir, there's no motion requirement for any motion at the committee today, and that would include a motion to adjourn. If that's what you're proposing, you're well within your right to move such a motion, but of course that would be up to you to move the motion, not, presumably, up to other members of the committee as to whether or not you should do that.

Mr. Sabir: I will move to adjourn the committee.

The Chair: Sorry. What you're moving to adjourn is this item under consideration, not to adjourn the meeting in its entirety, but provided that you're comfortable to do that – I mean, you're also welcome to do the other, but you would need to do this prior to the other no matter what way you cut.

Mr. Sabir: No. I will move us to adjourn the debate on this item until such time that we have some independent analysis, some numbers from the LAO, and some interjurisdictional scan of this issue.

The Chair: Oh, yeah. Well, there is a motion on the floor, of course, but the member is well within his right to move to adjourn that item for consideration.

Largely speaking, a motion to adjourn is not a debatable motion, and it's how it's handled inside the Assembly. The hon. Member Sabir has moved to adjourn debate on this item for today's meeting. I will call the question. Here in the room, anyone in favour, please say aye. In the room, anyone opposed? Joining us remotely, in favour, please say aye. Joining us remotely, please say no. The noes have it.

That motion is defeated.

We remain on the item before the committee, which is the motion by Member Getson. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? Member Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP seems really committed to giving themselves a more than 25 per cent increase on the same day that they've given themselves a salary increase, golden parachute, more constituency money. They've already increased their temporary accommodation allowance, giving themselves higher rent.

On this particular item, again, I note you are giving yourselves a higher caucus budget now than when you had 60 MLAs in the last Legislature. That makes no sense. That shouldn't be how that works. We don't have the appropriate math calculations, crossjurisdictional information.

To the UCP members of this committee: this decision-making process is completely broken. You don't have the best information going forward. This should be defeated, and I would encourage all members to vote against the motion that is before the committee.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the motion as proposed by Member Getson?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question. Here in the room, those in favour of the motion as proposed by Member Getson, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us remotely, those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried.

A recorded division has been requested by Member Gray. We will conduct this division in the way that we have done throughout the meeting. All those in favour here in the room of the motion as proposed by Member Getson, please raise your hand: Member Getson, Member Rowswell, Member Long. All those opposed, please raise your hand: Member Gray. I will call each of you on the phone individually. Please indicate in favour or opposed. Member Wiebe.

Mr. Wiebe: In favour.

The Chair: Member Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Aye.

The Chair: Member Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Against.

The Chair: Dr. Metz.

Dr. Metz: Against.

The Chair: Member Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Opposed.

Mr. Roth: Mr. Speaker, total for the motion, five; total against, four.

The Chair:

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Are there any other items under other business? I don't believe that there were.

This brings us to the conclusion of our meeting. I will just note that as the committee has now approved a change to the caucus budget funding formula, the 2025-2026 budget parameters document will also need to indicate this. It will be included in the other decisions that the committee has undertaken and will be circulated. My expectation of administration would be that it would be early to middle of next week for us to see that new budget parameters document.

Item 7 is the date of the next meeting, which will be at the call of the chair. I anticipate that we will require a budget meeting in the not-too-distant future. I hope to be able to approve any changes to the orders as a result of today's meeting as well.

I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Sabir: So moved.

The Chair: Hon. members, all in favour of the motion as proposed by Member Sabir, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:40 a.m.]

