

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

1:25 p.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Lund]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll call the meeting to order. I want to welcome you all to the new committee. Nancy Betkowski, of course, is the other new member, and she's not with us today. In any case, I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to work with you folks on this important committee.

Yes, Derek.

MR. FOX: If I might, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to welcome you to the committee as our new chairperson, and I would like to move that members of the Legislative Offices Committee extend their thanks and appreciation to our former Chair, Bob Bogle, and to former committee member Jack Ady.

It's been a pleasure working with them over the last four years, and we wish them well in their new postings. I just want to make sure that that's on the record, and I urge support for the motion from members of the committee.

MRS. GAGNON: I second that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have a mover and a seconder. Any further discussion? All in favour? Thank you very much for that motion.

Moving on to the business, you have before you an agenda for today's meeting. Do we have approval for that agenda?

MRS. GAGNON: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yolande. Tom, second?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a draft of the minutes of the meeting of January 20, 1993. Is someone prepared to move them as they are presented, or are there any amendments?

MR. SIGURDSON: I've read them. I'll move them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do we have a seconder? John. Is there any further discussion? If not, all in favour? Unanimous.

Okay, let's see. The first piece of business we have today, then, is to deal with the Ethics Commissioner, and I want to welcome Bob Clark and Karen South to the meeting. Bob, if you wanted to move right into it -- if you could take this through line by line, that would probably be the most expedient way to handle it.

MR. CLARK: Okay. Mr. Chairman, I officially apologize for the further delay that we caused you. The letter said 1 o'clock; somehow I marked it down as 1:30. I apologize. The offer of \$10 for a clock has been noted.

Obviously, I've brought Karen along today. Karen does the day-to-day administration in the office. I'll give the overview, and then

when we get to the real details, Karen will be able to give you some of the more day-to-day details.

I'd say three things, Mr. Chairman, as far as the overview is concerned. I just remind members that the office opened April 1 of last year. From the standpoint of what we need in the office, we think everything is there. We've been, as all members know, somewhat chomping at the bit to get going, and that now starts March 1, and we'll commence April 1 for deputy ministers and also senior officials. The third comment would be this. We have included in the budget two areas which I'm sure will catch your attention: one is the area under wages where we're asking for a part-time person, and the other deals with the area of professional and technical services. I'll explain that a bit more fully when we get to that item.

Those are the two areas, Mr. Chairman, that I'll touch on the most and then perhaps go in to kind of a question-and-answer session. Is that a reasonable way to approach it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. CLARK: The bottom line for our budget, as you can see from the top page, is that we expect to spend \$174,000 this year out of the estimated \$204,000 in our budget. You can see that we're asking for an amount of \$207,953 in the upcoming year.

Turning over to page 2, this is the area where we talked about wage staff. We had \$5,000 in our budget last year for temporary services. Karen's in a situation where under the present contract she's entitled to six weeks -- I was going to say absence without leave. That isn't accurate. Let's say six weeks of holidays. You know, I'm in the office, generally speaking, two and a half days a week. Most weeks it's the Monday and Tuesday of each week, although that obviously varies from week to week depending on what's happening.

Certainly when we look at our own agenda for May, June, and July, it's going to get very hectic. Take from the first of March, add 60 days to that, and then we get into that period where we'll be sitting down with each of the members and their spouses. Starting the first of April and 60 days from there, we start the same process with the 100 senior officials. So our calendar looks very, very busy up until the end of July. That's not taking into consideration at all anything which may or may not come from the public as far as requests for investigations.

So it's really with that background, members, that we're asking that a half-time person be available. We've spent close to \$5,000 in that area this year. Karen, how much?

MISS SOUTH: A thousand.

MR. CLARK: A thousand dollars in that area this year. That's better news. It would not be our intention to do anything other than bring someone in when Karen is away, and secondly, when we're involved with interviews with members and their spouses and also similar kinds of interviews with senior officials, so that we have someone who perhaps could do some of the arranging of that kind of work during that period of time. It's in those two circumstances that we expect to use this additional person.

MRS. GAGNON: I have a question about that. This would actually occur, then, during the peak time. This holiday period might come during the next, let's say, six months from April 1. So you need someone who's skilled and certainly understands the purpose of the office, the Act, and so on. Is that correct?

MR. CLARK: Well, a bit of knowledge as far as the Act and the office are concerned.

MRS. GAGNON: You can't just have someone who's strictly a receptionist taking calls and then holding things until you get back?

MR. CLARK: Well, for a six-week period of time, no, I don't think so. Now, I'm there two and a half days a week, and I'm available on very short notice to come in. But when we're going through the whole interview session and so on, Karen will be involved in a number of those too, so we'll likely need someone to help during those peak times also.

MRS. GAGNON: My last question, please, Mr. Chairman. What kind of background, then, would you be looking for, and would this person simply work during that time or year-round on a part-time basis?

MR. CLARK: No, just during that period of time.

One of the things we have to be very conscious of in the office is the confidentiality question, and this person would not have access to information in those areas. At the same time, we do have to have someone there at the office when Karen and myself aren't there and can organize meetings and things like that during the hectic period of time, do photocopying. There's a lot of that kind of thing. I would want to emphasize that this person would not be a person who would be dealing with the confidential nature of the files which we have in the office for very obvious reasons.

The kind of person that we used last year -- I'll ask Karen to elaborate on this -- was a young lady who had been one of the legislative interns. Is that right?

MISS SOUTH: A page.

MR. CLARK: Had been a page in the Assembly and is a university student now. We used that person for a period of time.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sigurdson.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thanks. Just with respect to the six weeks that you're entitled, is that exclusively holidays or is that time off in lieu of overtime?

MISS SOUTH: All management category employees are entitled to one week in lieu of overtime.

MR. SIGURDSON: Only one?

MISS SOUTH: I'm in my 18th year of public service, so I get five weeks vacation.

1:35

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. I was aware of, I guess, people who are not in the management category of the public service then. I know that there are other contracts out there where people are entitled to one week every quarter. Don't you wish.

MISS SOUTH: More when I used to work here, yes.

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah.

I guess I had some concern about having a person who is part-time that's going to be able to be assigned to your offices. The

arrangement you've had with this woman -- was it a woman page? -- that worked at your office: is she prepared to stay on on a permanent basis? Or do you know of an individual that's prepared to stay on on a permanent part-time basis? Is that the desire of the office?

MR. CLARK: The person who worked last year is at university right now, and we worked that through, obviously, the nonuniversity period of time. We've not gone to any lengths to explore the possibility of someone. There was a lady who worked for me when I was here at the Leg. for a number of years, and she's stepping down from a job that she presently has. Whether she's interested -- she's had some illness -- I don't know. We haven't got to that stage at all. It seemed to me that it would be somewhat presumptuous to do that before the committee had given us their judgment on our request.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? If not, perhaps we could move along to the next item then.

MR. CLARK: Moving on to page 3 in the information before you, that really covers salary, and then the 9 percent that I'm paid in lieu of pension is included in there also. That's the two salaries.

On page 4 the area that may catch your attention deals with the dental plan. I've chosen to take advantage of the dental plan. After one year that option is available, and that's the biggest change that I think you'll see there, members.

On to page 5. This deals with conferences. We went to the COGEL conference in Toronto last September, I believe it was. Both Karen and I went. I was the delegate and she was the . . .

MISS SOUTH: Nondelegate.

MR. CLARK: The nondelegate. My spouse did go, and I picked up the cost for that.

The other additional expense last year was the COGEL membership, which we hadn't included initially.

As far as the future is concerned, we've made the decision that next year -- the conference is in Minnesota -- one of us will go. If it meets with the approval of the committee, I would go to that one and the following year Karen would go to the conference. I think that after being in on one experience, one of us can gain from the conference but there's no need to send two delegates from the office.

MR. NELSON: I question whether we should even send one to that thing. It's the most useless thing that I've ever been to.

MR. SIGURDSON: You missed Derek's report last meeting.

MR. NELSON: Well, he might have missed mine too.

MR. SIGURDSON: We read it.

MR. NELSON: Good. Well, you know that my recommendation is that nobody go, and I'll still hang with that. I sat through a lot of sessions there, and I'm sure you did too, and it was a heck of an experience. But you got my report, and I didn't get anything useful out of it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, maybe they're not all the same. Let us move along to page 6.

MR. CLARK: On to page 6. I have money in there this year to travel to another jurisdiction. My plan is to go to British Columbia to meet the commissioner there. I've found Ted Hughes very helpful. Their legislation from the standpoint of the public now being able to address the commissioner's office in the same manner as in Alberta is coming into effect there, and I would like to have the option to go out to see him on occasion.

I should say that we did host -- we didn't host. Our offices were used by the Northwest Territories ethics people when they had a hearing in Alberta not long ago. The hearing was in Edmonton in our office. It was dealing with an issue in the Northwest Territories with the commissioner from Ontario, the commissioner from British Columbia, and then a group from the Northwest Territories there. I found that a very helpful experience, once again being able to share points of view with the other commissioners.

Moving on to page 7, the amount that's to be included for a car is there.

On to page 8 for Freight and Postage. I think this year we've spent a hundred dollars in that area to date. So our expectations have become somewhat more active the following year.

Moving on to page 9: just the rental that we pay on the machines that we have in the office.

MR. NELSON: I have a question. Why two fax machines?

MISS SOUTH: One is in the commissioner's home.

MR. CLARK: One is in my home so that I can and do get information quickly from the office and work on drafts of letters there and get them back. Also, when I'm not available in my home, Karen can leave the information for me there, and it's worked well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Gagnon.

MRS. GAGNON: Yes. From whom do you rent this equipment that you can't get out of government supplies or equipment?

MISS SOUTH: Actually, the fax machines are rented from two different companies.

MRS. GAGNON: Okay. The government would not supply your office with the equipment it needs; you had to go outside to rent. Is that correct?

MISS SOUTH: We did go outside.

MR. CLARK: Perhaps we should have waited. We simply went through a process of asking companies to submit bids to us.

MISS SOUTH: Well, in many respects we used the same companies for our office fax that the Leg. Assembly was dealing with. With respect to the fax that is in the commissioner's home, it was a fax that was set up in his home for his previous employment and we took over the contract.

MRS. GAGNON: I suppose this is consistent with what happens in MLA offices. What isn't available through government, we get it otherwise. That is purchased or leased for us. I have a fax machine, but it's not government issue. I have to rent from outside. So your position is similar then?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. NELSON: Well, I don't have a problem. I just wondered about you having two fax machines over there. I never even thought about your home. That's no problem.

MR. CLARK: I know you won't, but please don't hesitate to ask questions like that.

On page 10: Tolls, Cable, and Rentals. What's that, Karen?

MISS SOUTH: Phone and fax charges.

MR. CLARK: Okay. Page 11 is repairs and maintenance, \$700. We hope it's a repair-free year.

MR. NELSON: You won't get much done for that.

MR. CLARK: Isn't that right.

Page 12. I'd like to make a comment on the annual report. It's my expectation that the annual report will be seven or eight pages, something like that, on both sides. There will be no pictures. It will be photocopied. It will be a very much matter-of-fact type of thing. We do expect to do some additional brochures. At one committee meeting I showed these to members. I'll pass them around to you now. At that time I asked for them back, but please feel free to keep them. We'll be getting some to the constituency offices. With the addition of the responsibility for senior officials, we will be doing an update. This brochure cost us, I think, \$1,600, something like that.

Consultants, the consultants that we've used for outside legal assistance. I shared with the committee earlier the approach that we were using, where on matters of a general nature we've worked out an arrangement with Parliamentary Counsel's office where Frank Work, the Parliamentary Counsel, does work for us on a very regular basis on matters of general interpretation, that area. I would be remiss to members of the committee if I didn't say that Frank's work has been excellent. He's been extremely co-operative and very, very timely. We've tried to stay away from the pressures of time for sessions and things like that, but it's just been an excellent arrangement for us. We were assured by senior Parliamentary Counsel that a Chinese wall was erected so that any matter he was dealing with us on wasn't discussed with senior Parliamentary Counsel. I understand that meets the ethical questions of the legal fraternity, and certainly to date it's worked out very, very well for our office.

1:45

On outside matters we have engaged the services of David Jones, formerly on the staff of the University of Alberta law faculty. He and his wife are the only two members in the firm. They are not aligned politically with any group in the province and have been extremely helpful. We have not used them on many occasions. We all know what the cost is for people in the legal community but have used them on two or three different occasions when matters have arisen. It's certainly my expectation that we continue to use their services. I have put in the budget an amount of \$25,000. How much have we spent in that area this year, Karen?

MISS SOUTH: Just under \$7,000.

MR. CLARK: Just under \$7,000 to date on outside consultants. One other firm was used very, very early in one instance. There's nothing magic in the \$25,000, Mr. Chairman. It's the best guesstimate that we're able to put together with a recognition that starting March 1 the public will have access to the office. It's a bit of a guess as to how much outside counsel or outside consultants we

will need, but based on our experience to date, that's the best estimate that I can give you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Going up to the Contribution to Ottawa Publication, what's that about?

MISS SOUTH: Ottawa has for several years now done a comparative study of conflict of interest legislation across Canada, and they are right now working on a more detailed chart, preparing in great detail different aspects of conflict legislation across the country. They had asked each jurisdiction whether they would be willing to contribute assistance in preparing the material and also some moneys towards having it published.

MR. CHAIRMAN: When you say Ottawa, who are we talking about?

MISS SOUTH: It's the Assistant Deputy Registrar General's office. They are responsible for the conflict of interest legislation for the House of Commons.

MR. SIGURDSON: Have they ever had reports before that they've circulated?

MISS SOUTH: They've had at least two editions.

MR. SIGURDSON: So this would be the third edition then?

MISS SOUTH: It may come out as a separate publication. Our recommendation was to include it in the current . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: And previously other jurisdictions have contributed to the cost of research and publication? No, this is a first time request?

MISS SOUTH: Yes.

MR. CLARK: My sense, Tom, although I haven't got this in writing, is that Ontario and British Columbia are participating also. My first experience with it was when the commissioners met in Toronto prior to the conference that we were down to in September. The -- what's the title? -- chief deputy registrar from Ottawa . . .

MISS SOUTH: Assistant deputy.

MR. CLARK: He and his crew of three people were there. At that time they made the approach to the provinces to share the cost of this somewhat. We have suggested they simplify greatly the approach they were using and have indicated to them that subject to budget approval here in Alberta, we would be prepared to be a part of it. It would be available to anyone who wants the information. It will be really a cross-comparison between what the federal people are doing and what the various provinces in Canada are doing.

Saskatchewan has not moved along on legislation yet, although the matter is under review as I understand it. A similar comment on Manitoba. As you know, Ontario and British Columbia have moved earlier. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have some system in place. Then the federal people have an approach in place as far as members of the cabinet and exempt staff. There has been a Commons/Senate subcommittee which has reviewed the matter of conflict of interest legislation for federal Members of Parliament. The committee has made a report. My last checking on that indicated that nothing had happened on it; the report was still before the government.

MR. SIGURDSON: The previous editions -- did we model our legislation, obviously, on what other jurisdictions had done that stemmed from the Wachowich report? Have previous editions been at all beneficial to Ethics Commissioner offices? I'm wondering what the benefit of this report is. What value do you see? We now have a request from the assistant deputy registrar to contribute to a publication. What value do you see us getting from that publication? Are other jurisdictions going to be able to draw on the resources of the report?

MR. CLARK: Other jurisdictions will be able to draw on what we're doing here and know what we're doing here in Alberta and make use of that, hopefully. The other side of the coin is that we'd be able to see what's happening in other provinces. We keep close contact with Ontario and British Columbia as it is now. We likely have more to give than we will gain from the pulling together of all that information from across the country, Tom. That's my sense. I say that because Alberta's legislation in many regards is seen as having gone further in a number of areas than any other province. British Columbia has moved to that now with the move towards the public being able to make representation to the commissioner. That's why I say Alberta would likely give more than we might gain from that initially.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Gagnon, to you.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you. My question is really very similar. Other than providing information, is there any other purpose to this cross-provincial/federal publication? Is it meant to provide education, to influence others to get on with it, and that kind of thing?

MR. CLARK: If it is, that's not part of what was explained to me.

MRS. GAGNON: So it's simply information.

MISS SOUTH: It doesn't strictly deal with elected officials either. It also covers public servants, and it also contains contact persons. It summarizes legislation, guidelines, any kinds of rules and codes that pertain to conflict of interest. So it's useful in that sense in that it gives us contact persons within each jurisdiction. Since our office in Alberta is going to be covering the senior officials and the other conflict of interest commissions do not cover that, it's useful for us to know to whom to turn in those other jurisdictions and exactly what exists in those other jurisdictions.

MRS. GAGNON: So it's not only information. It's a resource piece of material as well.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Nelson.

MR. NELSON: I'm a very suspicious person by nature. I get a sense that this guy in Ottawa is looking for some money. He can't get it out of his own budget process, so now he's tapping the provinces for dough to do a little research project so he can keep his job. Would that be a reasonable assessment?

MR. CLARK: If he's going to keep his job on the thousand dollars he's getting from Alberta, it isn't much of a job.

MR. NELSON: Well, there are other moneys, possibly from Ontario and what have you. I'm just wondering if we're giving him a make-work project or part of one.

1:55

MR. CLARK: I guess I have a somewhat similar attitude once in a while when projects emanate from that area. I looked at what was involved in the request, and despite my initial inclination, I thought it would be helpful for us to have the basic information, Stan. That's why we put it in the budget. It isn't the kind of thing I see being in here every year.

MR. NELSON: In other words, let's give it a try. If it's useful, fine; if not . . .

MR. CLARK: If it's not, I know that next year people like you would remind me of what I've just said about it not being in here next year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Also, I would like to know if the other jurisdictions are going to participate in the funding.

MR. CLARK: That would be Ontario and British Columbia?

MR. CHAIRMAN: All the other jurisdictions, every jurisdiction that is going to participate in this thing: are they helping the funding?

MR. CLARK: My understanding is that Ontario and British Columbia are, but I'll check that out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you would, please.
Okay. Let us move on now.

MR. CLARK: Page 13, hosting and entertainment. I think we've spent something like \$570 there to date this year. The commissioner from the Atlantic provinces was out. We used summer staff from Mr. Work's office, and at the end of the summer the four of us got together and said thank you. We've not, I think, abused that at all.

Materials and Supplies is our estimate as to what we're going to need next year as far as materials and supplies are concerned now that we're operational.

On page 15, Software and Word Processing Equipment: that's only if a second person is needed in the office. We've put \$500 in there for Companies Branch so we'd be able to access that area for our ongoing responsibilities.

Office Equipment: we've put \$1,000 in there. That clock could come out of that.

MR. NELSON: You're not going to let me hear the last of that, are you?

MR. CLARK: No, I'm not; I'm sure of that.
Mr. Chairman, that's a quick overview.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sigurdson.

MR. SIGURDSON: Yes. I'd like to go back to page 4 if I could, please. I don't know if we can address it here, but the concern I have is with respect to long-term disability. God forbid that anything should happen to Karen or the commissioner. We have situations with constituency offices where constituency staff -- the constituency assistant of our colleague in West Yellowhead ended up with cancer, and the long-term disability didn't kick in for the longest period of time. The office goes unstaffed. I think it's one of the things we as a committee are going to have to address: what we do with an office such as this, with one person in the office? If Karen or, if Karen chooses to leave this office, her successor should become ill, how do we look at staffing the office? It's a very

important function that has to be maintained, and it's not built into the budgetary process. I haven't seen anything that would look after the needs of the office if the administrative staff should happen to go on LTDI or LTD.

It's just a concern that I raise. I don't know that we can address it here, but it's something I think we should look at at some point. You operate pretty much along the same lines that we do, a small office, and when one person is away for a long period of time, it can really hurt.

MR. CLARK: Could I just comment on that for a moment, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. CLARK: I think one of the additional complications in our office is the real sensitivity there is as far as confidentiality is concerned. I know how important a person is in a constituency office, just reflecting back on one of my other lives, and if we were to have that kind of thing happen in our office, there's no question that it would be a very, very serious problem for us.

MR. SIGURDSON: So your problem would be compounded by the fact of confidentiality.

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. SIGURDSON: But, again, you wouldn't have anybody kick in. Nobody would be able to come in and replace Karen for -- what? -- 90 days. Ninety days is that period of time you have to go without administrative staff on this insurance program.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Nelson, did you . . .

MR. NELSON: Well, I was just going to address Tom's question to some degree. I look at the \$20,000, going back to that. You indicated that part of that \$20,000 was for somebody taking six weeks of earned leave -- I'll be nice, Karen -- but it won't cost \$20,000 to replace a person for six weeks.

MR. CLARK: No. This would be a half-time person basically.

MR. NELSON: I'm just questioning whether or not you need a person there other than for that six weeks, even though you're going to be busy during the initial period of MLAs coming in to see you possibly after an election this spring, this fall, or whenever it's going to be.

MR. CLARK: Those again.

MR. NELSON: Yeah, it will. You may have a busy year.

Maybe I'll just deal wholly here -- what I'm looking for and probably asking you to do as a member of the committee, and the committee will have the final decision, is to come here with a zero increase in your budget. I know that when I was at AADAC, Treasury had asked us for a zero increase and minus 10. That came from the department rather than the government. They may change their mind on anything of that nature, so don't lean to that, but I think what we're going to have to look for is a zero percent increase, which means we're talking to you about \$3,800, which may have to come out of there or one of these, whether it's professional and technical services or something like that, or wherever you feel you can find zero percent. That's the bottom line, really, where I think we're going to have to start talking from. It may mean that the

committee is going to have to make the decision, because it would be my view that that is what we're going to be dealing with. So maybe you'll have to come back here and say, "Look, this is where I can get zero percent, and this is how we can do it." Overall, I don't have any problem with your budget, because I know you have to work lean and mean. At the same time, I think there's going to be a very severe push for zero increases. That's my assessment personally.

MRS. GAGNON: I have a question, please, to Mr. Sigurdson. Tom, are you saying that because our constituency budgets are frozen -- like, it's based on a basic allotment and a per person allowance -- if one of our staff becomes sick on a long-term basis, then we cannot afford to replace that person at all because there's just no more money and we have to continue to pay the salary of the person who's ill? Are you suggesting, then, that there needs to be some kind of staff replacement budget line in all our budgets, including offices of this committee as well as MLA offices? I know that might be something for Members' Services, but something I've never thought of, although my own secretary has MS and could be away at some time.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, this is one of the things that Members' Services was about to address. They were about to address it because the constituency assistant for West Yellowhead unfortunately was diagnosed and subsequently died from cancer. For a long period of time he had to pay the wages of the individual out of the constituency budget, and there was no additional funding to hire somebody else. That's the problem that we have with small constituency offices, the Ethics Commissioner office: if the administrative support person becomes ill, the office could shut down. With caucuses being what they are, you can usually move somebody around; you can call-forward the telephones. The Ethics Commissioner is a little different, and I think the budget should reflect something in there. I hear Stan arguing about zero percent and I can appreciate that, but I think that's a figure we may have to consider putting in, hopefully never having to expend it. The funds should be there to ensure that in the event the administrative support goes on long-term disability, there's somebody else to take that position. I say that aware of the fact that you have, you know, the matter of confidentiality as an extraordinary concern.

2:05

MR. NELSON: Well, I'd like to address that point. Hopefully, that situation won't occur, just for the benefit of the commissioner's and Karen's health. I don't see a problem there because if something were to happen so that there was an emergency, the chairman can call a meeting of this committee very quickly and approve something and take it through to get a special warrant for a commissioner. I don't really see that that's a major problem at this point in time, and it's not a big-ticket item, regardless, in the overall picture of things.

However, I think when we present budgets this year, we're going to have to show some responsibility to everybody, including the public, particularly the public. And you are correct: with a small office, there are difficulties in doing certain types of business with limited resources. At the same time, in a circumstance like this or within the other offices we are responsible for, if we find ourselves in that situation you can always get the committee meeting very quickly with as many members as can attend. The commissioner can come and make his case. If we feel generous to that case, we can make representation to government and get a special warrant for \$10,000 or \$20,000, whatever the case may be. So I'm not really hung up on that issue like I may seem to be.

MR. SIGURDSON: If that's the understanding of the committee, then I've got no problem with that. I'm just saying that there's nothing in here right now that looks at the possibility of there being a long-term illness.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I appreciate you raising that, Tom, because it's a very good point. I think Stan's solution to the problem is one that we certainly could accommodate.

Mr. Fox.

MR. FOX: Yes. Bob, following Stan's expressed concerns about the \$20,000 anticipated expense for wage staff, I'd like to pursue that a little more. It seems to me that this is a new office and we're all sort of trying to adjust to what the actual costs of running the office are and what the actual personpower needs are to accomplish everything that needs to be accomplished. Certainly, through no fault of your own, the first year of operation wasn't quite what you anticipated or what we anticipated. Now, eventually the Act is coming into force, March 1, and for the subsequent fiscal year it will be a much busier time, at least the first half of the fiscal year. So we understand there are going to be some additional demands on the office, but that should subside once the initial filings and disclosure statements are prepared. The annual update of that sort of thing is not going to be nearly as demanding in terms of time or resources as the initial filing.

I'm just wondering. I understand that you need someone there when Karen's away; that's six weeks. Are you anticipating hiring someone from April 1 until the work subsides while Karen is there, so there will be two people working in addition to yourself for a period of time, or what? You describe it as half time, and like Stan points out, six weeks doesn't add up to half a year, so we're wondering how the rest fits in there.

MR. CLARK: I would see, really, trying to accomplish two things: one, having someone there during what I anticipate to be the real busy period of time to help with the busy time, but also so they'd get a little bit of understanding of the office and the legislation and so on. So when Karen's away and people phone in, that person can do more than say, "This is the office; I don't know anything about this, but I'll get back to you," kind of thing, so that there'd be a little bit of familiarity there, Derek. I would see us doing the two things. I don't anticipate, quite candidly, that we'd need a person there half-time at all.

I am aware, though, that in the year we're now in we could have a filing of members, which would be finished by the end of April. Then if we have some extracurricular activity later on in the year, within 60 days after that again members would file. If we're into a situation where there are . . .

MR. FOX: Is that what you call an election? Extracurricular activity?

MR. CLARK: That's what they used to call it in 1960. Excuse me; if there's an election.

So we'd go through a refiling again as far as new members are concerned and as far as new people in the cabinet and so on. They'd go through a new situation also.

We're at a bit of a guess right now, Derek, as to how much time is going to be needed for the senior officials and how ongoing that's going to be. Our best guess now is that we're looking at between 90 and 100 people here.

MR. FOX: So if this budget is approved -- you've got \$20,000 allotted here -- you anticipate hiring someone April 1. Is that right?

MR. CLARK: Well, it would be on an as needed basis.

MR. FOX: Oh, I see.

MR. CLARK: It wouldn't be a full-time person. If we can find someone on the basis that they're needed for, let's say, two and a half or three months, it may be two days a week that this person comes in but not on a regular basis at all. Ideally, that's what I'd like to do. Now, whether we can find that person, Derek, I don't know. We were very fortunate last year with a young lady who was going to university and who had been a page. She understood what members of the Legislature were involved in, and she had some sense for the Act; she had some feeling. That worked out really very well. I hope to get someone like that again, but there's no guarantee.

MR. FOX: So the \$20,000 is a sort of guesstimate of what may be required?

MR. CLARK: Yes, it is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions, comments?

MR. NELSON: Of course, you can always work through the Speaker's office about some of those young people.

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we are not approving any of the budgets today, but does the committee have any direction that they would like to direct to the Ethics Commissioner as it relates to the budget?

MR. NELSON: I stated my position already. I think we have to look at a zero.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I recognize that there hasn't been a formal direction sent, and to my knowledge the committee has not had a direction formally that we have to pass along. So I guess it would at the pleasure of the committee if you wanted to have a motion directing the commissioner at this point to come back with something somewhat different. Now, we have to bear in mind that if in fact we get a directive, we will have to carry that forward as well.

Mr. Fox.

MR. FOX: Well, I'd like to make the motion proposed initially by Mr. Nelson,
that the officer come back to the committee with a hold-the-line budget,
zero percent,

just so we can look at and discuss the implications of that on a comparative basis to the budget presented today, so we understand what would be the impact on the office and your ability to perform your function. I would make that motion so that we have that to consider.

MR. NELSON: I'll second it just to get it on the table.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Nelson seconds.
Okay; go ahead, Mr. Fox.

MR. FOX: I recognize that because you've only had one budget, we're in a sense comparing apples to oranges. It's difficult to compare fiscal '93-94 to fiscal '92-93 in terms of the workload, the additional requirements that will be made of your office in terms of annual disclosure, in terms of an election, new members, additional

people required to comply with the mandate of the legislation. I understand that, but I think we should be in a position to examine a hold-the-line budget and discuss the implications of that with the officer at our subsequent meeting.

2:15

MRS. GAGNON: I'd like to support that but with the understanding that the budget as presented here is actually very efficient and so on. Most items are down significantly except three areas: the contribution to the publication, a slight wage increase, and the possibility of one part-time person. So while supporting that, I think we have to show some understanding that this office is about to expand its mandate as well as its responsibilities, and this committee has to understand that we will not have a well-functioning ethics office in the province unless we're willing to fund it adequately.

I do want to say that when you look at each of the line items, you know, there's been great restraint shown all the way through, and there are just these three suggested areas. I do support the motion. If it's something that's possible to achieve, then I suppose we can work towards that, but I see great restraint there already.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, that's exactly the point, that this budget comes to us with a request for an additional half-time individual to cover off the increased workload that you're going to have. So I guess this committee has to determine whether or not we're going to make sure the office is properly functioning. Everything else, as I look through it, has got a subtraction figure beside it in the form of a decrease in almost every code. So I guess the question for us to wrestle with is whether or not we support the addition of a half-time person to make sure that your office is functioning. If we do, do we want to pay that person fairly? If this proposal had come to us without that individual being in there, we'd be looking at almost a 10 percent cut.

MR. NELSON: That would be great.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, that's what we would have, Stan. What we have to do is determine whether or not this office deserves a half-time person or not. That's the question. It's not a question of coming back at zero percent; that's easy enough to do. God, you could come back with nothing at all. You could come back with minus 10, but would your office function properly? I would like to know: from what you've indicated so far, do you need that half-time person?

MR. CLARK: Could I react to that? I need not say this, but I'd like to make the point anyway. This is my first experience. How do you go about bringing a budget forward like this? I don't know whether it's the approach which is most successful. I guess we'll all find out later. Rightly or wrongly I've chosen to say that there are really two areas here where I can see the need for some additional support down the road. One is in this area of having the money in the budget to have a third person in our office for as much as half-time if that's needed. I really would want to emphasize "if that's needed." That's going to depend on the public response, as I've said, and also the very busy time that we're going to have starting the first part of April.

The other thing is -- and I've been very up front with you too -- the question of professional services. I reflect back on my own experience when I sat in a similar situation to you people. I used to hate to have to come back and say: we need a special warrant. Maybe I've erred here on the side of being overly straightforward with you in putting this budget forward. I wouldn't have included those things if I didn't really think we needed them. I hope that at the end of the year, if you approve this, we can come back and say:

we didn't need that. From my point of view, from my kind of farm background, it's better to do that than it is to come to you next December and say: my gosh, we need another \$15,000. That's the basis that I've approached this on.

MR. NELSON: Well, we have legislative restraints in any event for the overall budget. What is it? Two percent this next fiscal year; 2 and a quarter percent or something?

However, regardless of that, I think that maybe we're overly focusing on this individual. There are other areas. I guess the importance is: do you place the importance on a staff member or going, you know, to COGEL? There's a couple of thousand dollars there. If we pass the motion saying a zero percent increase, I don't think that I want to sit here and say, "Well, look; why don't you do it this way?" I think that you can come back and tell us how you can deal with that.

MR. CLARK: And we certainly will.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fox.

MR. FOX: Yeah. Just to clarify the motion. I'm not speaking in favour of or against a zero percent increase or the additional staff person. The motion was that we be presented with budget figures that reflect a zero percent increase so that we can discuss that in a comparative way with the budget presented and consider through further consultation with the officer and senior administrator the implications on the operation of that office. It's merely for information.

I gather that the government's budgeting process is evolving, but we're not required to submit final budgets for the officers immediately. Perhaps the chairman could clarify when we need to complete deliberations with the four officers and submit budget proposals.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As I said earlier, we have had no directive at this point.

MR. FOX: Yeah. So we're gathering information and conferring.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments? If not, are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favour of Mr. Fox's motion? Opposed? Carried.

That, then, would complete this round. Looking through the budget, I want to compliment you on it. It certainly represents a lot of work and is, I think, a very responsible type budget. We will look forward to the next round. Thank you.

MR. CLARK: Okay. Being new at this, what is the next round?

MR. CHAIRMAN: As I've said, we do not have a directive at this point, so the time of our next meeting will be at the pleasure of the Chair. I just can't tell you, because I don't know.

MR. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, we certainly will get right at it following the motion and get a revised budget back to you. Then is it a question of your committee picking one or the other of the budgets?

MR. NELSON: We'll call you back here.

MR. CLARK: Oh, you will.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, you'll be back. You'll have an invitation to appear before us again.

MR. CLARK: We also agreed -- didn't we? -- that I would get the information from Ontario and British Columbia for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, we'd want that at the next one.

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Chairman, I'm wondering, though, if the Ethics Commissioner isn't under a time constraint. The Act does kick in fairly soon, and there may be the necessity of knowing whether another person is a possibility or not. Should we give ourselves a time limit to make a decision as regards the extra person? For the office to function there may be that necessity.

MS BETKOWSKI: As of maybe March 1.

MRS. GAGNON: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. We'll take that into consideration. Thanks.

Mr. Fox, did you have a comment?

MR. FOX: Now that we're off the budget, we're going into a period of heightened activity in the office, and I wondered if either Bob or Karen wanted to say anything to us about what happens after March 1. Any messages that you'd like us to convey to our respective caucuses about the filing, about whether people get in touch with you or you get in touch with them, or just any further advice about that.

MR. CLARK: Well, I think all members had delivered to their offices some time ago now that little, thin brown envelope with the forms in it.

2:25

MR. NELSON: Oh, is that right?

MR. CLARK: I hope so, Stan.

Obviously, a number of members are being very conscientious about working at it, because we've had a number of calls from members. I think we've met with -- what would you say, Karen? -- close to 60 members.

MISS SOUTH: That we've heard from.

MR. CLARK: Sixty members that we've heard from. So there is a goodly number of members really working at it.

Please remind your colleagues that from March 1 there are 60 days. After the 60 days it's really important that the forms be in because it's something we have to follow up quickly. The experience in Ontario was not good when they let that date slide and slide and slide. I just get a sense that this committee or public expectation, too, would be that that 60 days is 60 days; it isn't 65 days or 70 days or 75 days. Please pass that on to your colleagues.

Secondly, in the package that went out, Karen included a questionnaire about where we might meet the member and the member's spouse. We are prepared to go to a number of areas across the province to make that easier. If members can get those back to us -- the sooner the better -- we can kind of do up a bit of an itinerary so we can get that done in the four to five weeks we've set aside for

it. So if you can get that message out to your colleagues, that would be excellent.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; thank you.

MR. FOX: Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; one more.

MR. FOX: We're still ahead of time here. I wanted to follow up. The clock starts to tick on March 1. It's a 60-day time line. If, to use your term, some extracurricular activity occurs within that 60-day period, i.e. an election, does the clock stop ticking and start again with all members at some point after the election? For members who are members now and who are members after the election, is it a new process?

MR. CLARK: The clock would start to tick again after the election is over.

MS BETKOWSKI: So you'd have to refile; is that what you're saying?

MR. CLARK: No. For members who are re-elected and who had their information in to us previous to the election, there would be no need to refile unless there was a change in the circumstances.

MR. FOX: But for members who didn't file and if the election occurs before the 60 days are up, they would then have another 60 days after the election to file.

MR. CLARK: Starting at perhaps the date the Chief Electoral Officer receives all the . . .

MR. FOX: The writs.

MR. CLARK: Right, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks again.
We'll take a five-minute break.

[The committee adjourned from 2:28 p.m. to 2:35 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let us call the meeting to order once again.

I want to welcome you, Mr. Johnson, and Dixie Watson to our committee meeting. The way we would like to proceed: if you could just give us an overview of the budget, then we'll go line by line and the committee members will ask questions as we're going through. So if you care to proceed.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to present the first budget to you as Chair and Ms Betkowski. Welcome to the committee from our perspective.

The budget itself that I'm presenting to you and to the remainder of the committee really is a hold-the-line budget. Given economic constraints and concerns right now, I think that it's an appropriate way to present this particular budget. Many of the costs that you'll see reflect just transfers between contract and salaried positions. That's the very nature of my office: some of the people I hire on salary; some I hire under contract. So some of the moneys you'll see are just paper shifts as much as anything else.

There are two areas within the budget that do represent an increase. One will be in the advertising area, and I think it will warrant further explanation and probably some discussion and

debate within this committee as to whether that is an appropriate process to follow. The second one is in Data Processing Services. It is not equipment, but it is an increase in costs. Many of them are uncontrollable, and I can explain that as we get closer to it.

In terms of group 1, Manpower, the salaried positions themselves, this represents remuneration of employees in permanent positions, and they're excluding contractual agreements. The change in the fees themselves. There will be merit increases within the administrative support field. There will be some merit increases in opted-out and excluded. There is an expectation that management salary freezes will be lifted in June. This is an expectation. We're not sure whether that really will happen, but we had to build into the budget the potential that that's going to happen because our direction doesn't imply anything else.

The paper transfer I referred to in my opening remarks. Of the four new staff hired, they're all on a salaried basis. I transferred in from other departments people who were salaried rather than hire external to government, which I would normally hire in under contract. So they're salaried. The increase that you see in the estimate represents those increases in terms of the salaried positions themselves.

In terms of the second, 711C, which is Wages, I'm still not advocating at this point that we have any wage people. During 1992-93 actual I did hire a person from a student position and placed it in here. However, within the budget there are allowances for me to transfer between the different subsections within a group. That's how I hired there. What I did was attempt to get by without one of the staff members, and I brought it back to this committee, who did approve a permanent hiree in there. So there'll be nothing under 711C.

Payments to Contract Employees: you'll notice that there is a decrease in this particular one. Again, as I pointed out, the majority of these are paper transfers between contract and salaried positions. There also is under Payments to Contract Employees potential management salary freeze lifting, if you will. Specifically in this particular area I'm the only manager under contract. Whether or not there will be an increase, of course, only time will tell, but we have built it in.

Under Employer Contributions there is an increase this particular year. The calculations for Employer Contributions are done at 13.8 percent of payroll. There is an increased cost this year due to employer increases in Canada pension plan, Blue Cross, group dental plan, long-term disability insurance, and of course the two pension plans affecting my office: the public service pension plan and the public service management pension plan.

Allowances and Benefits, 711F: basically this is training courses. I'm being very cautious in terms of sending people on courses. Our estimate last year was \$10,000; our estimate this year is \$10,000. I'm asking for no increase. Basically I'm attempting to set it up so that each employee could go to a training course which would cost our department \$275 per employee. Now, sometimes an employee will go where it costs more, but it evens out over the space of time. Memberships are also in this particular Allowances and Benefits portion. I have my one lawyer on staff who is a member of the Canadian bar and the Law Society.

There is a conference coming up this particular year. It's the Canadian Ombudsmen's conference and will be in Toronto. I'm planning, if possible, to take two to three of my investigators with me as a developmental process.

Mr. Chairman, that's it for group 1. Really there's not much of an increase at all as shown in here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions from committee members on group 1?

MR. NELSON: Why don't we just go through the whole thing?

MR. CHAIRMAN: If not . . .

MS BETKOWSKI: Can I just ask a question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MS BETKOWSKI: Is there any standard format in terms of submission of these budgets? It's a very different submission from the one we just dealt with of the Ethics Commissioner. Is there any?

MR. FOX: You'll find quite a variety over the next couple of weeks.

MS BETKOWSKI: It might be useful just from my point of view to have the kind of breakdown that you've outlined on what's merit, what's increases in salary, just in a little more itemized way for the future, not now. We can go through the whole thing. Plus percentages: it's helpful to me to have percentages written down.

MR. JOHNSON: I think that if you look at the bottom line, the total Manpower, it represents a \$30,000 increase. As we went through the specifics of it, it's expected that increases are coming between 3.1 and 3.3 percent for administrative support and for opted-out and excluded, 4.5 percent to 4.7 percent. We have no idea what the management increase is going to be, so we've done the best guess calculation that is possible right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, if I might comment, prior to the meeting I, too, found it a little difficult to try to figure out exactly what was going on. I think the overview that you gave to us verbally, line by line could be really useful if we had that in our package prior to the meeting.

Go ahead, Ms Betkowski.

MS BETKOWSKI: A form would help you, I'm sure, to submit too because you don't know what . . .

What's your total manpower component at the Ombudsman?

MR. JOHNSON: It's 20 persons, including myself.

MS BETKOWSKI: Okay. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Nelson, did you have . . .

MR. NELSON: Yeah. Now I've lost my train of thought.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Let us move along, then, to Supplies and Services.

MR. JOHNSON: Supplies and Services, group 2, sir. You'll notice that under Travel Expenses the estimate was \$98,600 last year and has been reduced to \$79,200. A number of issues is involved here. I'm trying to have my investigators resolve complaints on the phone as much as possible. Now, there are times -- and I think you know the nature of my office -- where we have to go out and spend time both with the complainant and a district office. So there does come a travel expense in here. One of the things we've noticed lately -- and I'm very pleased -- is that my investigators are staying with friends on the road as much as they are in hotels. From a budget perspective that pleases me. It costs \$15 per night rather than a hotel from a budget. I've noticed that, and I'm pleased. It's minor in a sense, but in the other sense it shows that the staff themselves are being very aware that we're under budget constraint.

My own travel during the next portion of the budget will be down considerably. This is mostly for the two of you who are new to the committee. I established, when this committee made the recommendation to select me, that I would attend every electoral boundary area in the province and make a public presentation, allowing people to come in, discuss with me, hear what the role of the Ombudsman is, and then I would discuss individual complaints at the end. I'm pleased to report that I only have five such public presentations left. I set five years as a mandate for that, and we've accomplished it in just over three years. Hopefully by the end of March I will have had the whole province completely covered. I will be setting a secondary priority, and that is where my investigators are going out to the different parts of the province. I'm going to request that they be available to meet with complainants at night, and complainants can then phone in. So it won't be me personally going out and making this public presentation; it will be my investigators being available should they be out in any portion of the province.

2:45

In terms of the investigators, there will be a cost if I do take some to Toronto, which is my intent: two to three investigators. There is a solicitors' conference that will be held somewhere in Canada this particular year. The other reason for the decrease in travel expenses this year is that last year there was an international conference in Vienna which I and one member of my staff attended along with members of this committee, and there is no international conference this particular year. That's held every four years.

The other under Travel Expenses is the lease to the car I'm allotted within the public service and supplies area. That comes out of this particular budget as well as the auto cost repairs and maintenance.

MR. NELSON: Maybe we should have a breakdown.

MR. JOHNSON: Would you like a further breakdown of that? Ombudsman travel . . .

MR. NELSON: No. Maybe just send it over in note form to all the members. Just break down your car and other travel and what have you, because I think there may be questions. If it's sent to us, maybe we won't have to ask particular ones.

MR. JOHNSON: Certainly. As I pointed out, my request is almost a \$20,000 decrease in the budget this year.

Under 712C, which is the Advertising area, this is one that I think should generate some discussion within this committee in terms of priorities, of whether or not what I'm aiming to do meets with what this committee feels from a policy perspective it should be. There will be decreased touring that I will do; therefore, those particular costs will be down. I am unable to reach every high school. This is one of the things I would have liked to have done. I never set it as an objective, but if I'm in an area and a high school has a class I can go in and talk with, which has happened in a number of different areas, I go in and talk with them. But I cannot reach the 575 high schools in the province; I just physically cannot do it. So what was recommended by a member of this committee -- and unfortunately that member of this committee is absent today, for moral support as much as anything else. Actually, he brought up -- and I thought it was well worth consideration -- developing a video similar to the one done by the Speaker. These videos are then presented to high schools and can be presented to classes through social studies groups and any government programs they may run in terms of introducing students to government. The cost for the production of that video is actually \$42,200 in total, with another \$2,000 I've put aside under

the increase in Advertising for a copy of the tape to be presented to every high school in the province, which as I pointed out is 575 high schools. I think this one warrants much more discussion from this committee, because it is a change in policy direction that I'm taking or at least recommending.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions on the advertising at this point? We'll leave that for the discussion later.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman, under 712D, Insurance, it's still \$1,000. What it is is basically deductible amounts our office has to lay aside for automobile accidents, property thefts, robberies, holdups, and there's a \$5,000 fidelity bond that's paid for out of that particular area. So it's still only \$1,000. It's not going up.

Under 712E, you'll notice again no increase requested. This is just regular usage for all our mail and the cost of mailing our annual reports. One of the things we are trying to do is establish from those that are recipients of the annual reports outside our jurisdiction whether or not they're of any value to them. Last year we sent a request to come back to us in a letter format whether or not they are of value, and if they're not, we'd stop sending them. We've got all those back and are now compiling them.

Rentals, 712G: you'll also notice a decrease of just over \$2,000. This includes rentals of office equipment and postage meter rental, that type of thing. We have decreased the cost of our photocopier and our contracts in that area in Edmonton. We actually reduced it \$2,100, as I pointed out. This particular area also includes hall rentals for tours, and that will be down because, as I pointed out, I only have five left throughout the province.

Under 712H, Telephone and Communications, no increase or decrease. What we have been able to do is decrease the number of phone calls after hours. I've asked that my investigators do them during the hours to certain areas when they have access to the RITE line. If they're working at 6 or 7 or 8 o'clock at night, I've asked them if they can hold the phone calls back until the next day. This has shown a reduced fee.

What I'm also including in here, and this came out of a survival course two of my investigators attended: they are recommending especially for my female investigators that when they travel to more remote parts of the province, they be equipped with cellular phones. When people are -- I don't want to use the term "out in the boondocks"; "away from a phone" is the best way to put it. The car of one of my female investigators broke down, and somebody stopped to assist her by the side of the road. She refused to take a ride. It probably would have been fine, but she ended up hiking about three miles to a farm and phoned from there. That came right on the heels of this request for the cellular phone. I support, from a safety perspective, access to a cellular phone. I'm looking at getting the portables so that anybody can pick up the package as they leave the office, place it in their car. The actual plug-in is through the cigarette lighter, so it's not attached to anybody's personal car. I could do without an increase in this portion of the budget because of other ways we've cut back in terms of use of long-distance telephone calls.

Under 712J, Repairs and Maintenance, again no increase. This is repairs to the dictamikes, cleaning and repairs for fax machines and typewriters. We found it cheaper to do our own every time something broke down rather than signing a maintenance contract, which was in fact almost \$2,000. So we're doing our own just as they're breaking down and requiring changes.

Under 712K, Contract Services, again a reduction from the estimate of last year: \$28,600 last year to \$26,800 this year. This is where I need outside legal opinions or outside special assistance from engineers who must do certain dam reports or weir reports or

heights of lakes. Any of those for which I don't have the expertise currently on hand, I've been able to go outside and do. So I am requesting a decrease in this area because we haven't used all the moneys in this area in the past. Last year we did because of some special legal work that had to be done and I did not have on staff at that time a full lawyer. I had a university professor on secondment, and there were some long-term issues that had to be dealt with. But as I point out, I'm requesting a decrease in . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that where that \$54,400 came in? I'm trying to figure out why . . . I see in '91-92 . . .

MR. JOHNSON: Okay. Yes, that is correct.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's it?

MR. JOHNSON: That is correct. There were a couple of files that were very intricate, to say the least, and required specific expertise that I did not have on staff. Probably you're unaware of it, Mr. Chairman, but this has already been back to committee once. I had to transfer moneys in to cover that particular cost, and this committee approved those transfers.

Under 712L, Data Processing, there is an increase from \$37,400 to \$42,900. There is a hardware maintenance cost. There is some additional equipment which this committee has authorized, but we now need the maintenance in place. LAN administration still is nowhere near as expensive. A LAN is the local area network within the computer programs that we're running. We are still well under by at least one to one and a half person years in maintaining our LAN network. Most of it is dealing with Dixie's area. She has kept the cost down, and she is doing it herself as just an additional function. So we've saved one to one and a half person years by doing it that particular way.

2:55

One of the things that is causing us an increase here: PWSS, Public Works, Supplies and Services; charge for storage of data entry, charge for printout, charge for duplicates even though they may not be needed. They have a program where everything is done in duplicate. We really only need one copy. We've gone back to PWSS and requested only the one copy, and they say: "Well, we're running them off anyway. It's cheaper to run two copies than one copy because the bigger departments need two copies. You're such a small department for us to change the program." It still is something I am pursuing with the deputy minister, and I will pursue beyond the deputy minister level if I can't get it resolved. It seems to me that if they're going to be running two copies and we only need one, we should be charged only for what we actually need. So I am pushing to get that one clarified.

We are getting increased on-line fees in this area. Payroll through Treasury now has come back and indicated that we must have our payroll on line. Before, as a very small office, Treasury used to do it at no cost to our office. We used to just supply them with a hand copy; they did the data entries. We are now paying -- and we had to buy a computer to do so -- for our on-line costs, our time, because we're doing it all. It saves Treasury a fairly significant amount of money. It increases my budget, but in the overall cost, if you take in all the government departments, it's best to do it the way they are doing it. But it does make my budget go up. That is the explanation for the increase in data processing.

In terms of Hosting, 712M, I'm requesting a decrease from \$3,500 to \$3,000. As you'll notice from my actual 1991-92 of \$1,759, I'm not a big hoster.

Other Purchased Services, 712N. There is no change; \$1,600 is what we're requesting. This involves fees to the International Ombudsman Institute -- it's an annual membership fee in U.S. dollars of \$1,000 -- and also an office membership in the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society: two basic areas.

MS BETKOWSKI: What was the jump in the '92-93 forecast on that?

MR. JOHNSON: I'm sorry.

MS BETKOWSKI: It went up to \$5,200 for forecast.

MR. SIGURDSON: Sorry. Where are you, Nancy?

MS BETKOWSKI: The '92-93 forecast.

MR. JOHNSON: Okay. That is also a move. One of my investigators was hired from another area outside Edmonton and was transferred in. The costs for that are done in that area.

MS BETKOWSKI: Okay.

MR. JOHNSON: Materials and Supplies, 712P. There is a decrease of \$1,400. Basically, the justification for the decrease is that because of our improved computer technology, we now can transfer our reports to the printers at a lower cost. This savings is a result of that. Mr. Chairman, that's Group 2.

MRS. GAGNON: I want to ask a question about 712C, Advertising. Would it not be better to call it education? You're not going to do \$51,000 worth of advertising. If you're producing a video, it's to educate, to expand the knowledge of your office's function and possible solutions to conflict and that kind of thing. Shouldn't it be called education? Or is there some advertising in there?

MR. JOHNSON: No. We could call it education as well. This seems to be the most appropriate spot to put it in the budget. We could say advertising and education in terms of a budget submission here.

MRS. GAGNON: I'm just thinking of clarity of intent, perception as to what it is you're doing here and that kind of thing. You're not advertising your services or anything; it's telling people about this type of office. It's a suggestion.

MR. JOHNSON: The point is well taken.

MR. SIGURDSON: Have you talked with teachers to find out whether or not they'd include it in their curriculum, in their instruction? I know that some teachers I've talked to tell me they haven't got sufficient hours now to teach all they're expected to teach.

MR. JOHNSON: Where I'm getting this from primarily is when I go into these communities. If the high schools and whatever hear that I'm coming, they're very, very quick to grab on and say, "Hey, can you come and make a presentation here?" So I'm basing it on that. The second side of it is a suggestion of one member of this committee with a schooling background who felt this to be one of the more appropriate ways to get the message out to students when I can't physically attend all the high schools.

MR. SIGURDSON: I'm just wondering if we shouldn't maybe make some contact with the ATA or some local schools in our constituencies to find out if they would see this as something they would like to have in a video library that they can access. I agree that there's a need to educate Albertans about the value of your office. I just want to make sure that if we're going to spend \$40,000-plus, the tool is going to be properly utilized and is not just collecting dust.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah. What I've got so far in phoning the Department of Education is that, yes, it would be of value to have it. But nobody's saying it's an absolute usage.

I think what I'm trying to present to this committee is a philosophical change in the process of educating. If this committee is prepared to support that, then I will pursue it to the next level. But there's no way I could pursue it without some budget funding up front and saying, "Yes, this money is available." If you don't want me to pursue that further and say, "We don't want to accept it within the budget format," then that will be end of it.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, again, I like the idea of people becoming aware of the function of the office. I think it's important to get that out there. A lot of people are not even aware that the office exists, let alone the function you serve. I don't know if spending \$42,000, though, is the best way to communicate that. I guess I'd want to talk to a couple of teachers and see if they're going to utilize it. If they would recommend a video, would they recommend some print material? Could we simply change the format of some of the print we send out through constituency offices? The material you take with you when you travel: can we change that to suit the audience in grades 10, 11, and 12?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Of that \$42,000, how much is the actual cost of producing the video?

MR. JOHNSON: It is the \$42,000, and then there's . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: So there was nothing in there for distribution.

MR. JOHNSON: There's \$2,000 above that for distribution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. I missed that.
Mrs. Gagnon.

MRS. GAGNON: I really think it's important for Albertans to know they don't have to be victims of the system. I mean, people are so cynical right now, and it's really important for them to know that this type of office exists and so on. But I also question whether the video would be the most effective means. I'm wondering: what are you doing now other than attending public meetings and also attending at high schools or junior highs and talking to students? Is there a brochure that is sent to every school? What is your present way of informing especially young Albertans about your office?

MR. JOHNSON: There is no specific program right now at the high school level. There is at the university and college levels, where each postsecondary education facility in the province is offered a presentation on their site. But I know I'm missing an awful lot of people who do not go on to postsecondary education facilities. I don't send out brochures to every high school. In terms of presentations over and above the public side, I do make private presentations to numerous organizations. I mean, you name the organization; I probably have been in touch with it. But there is nothing at the high school level per se, and I think there's a real need

to identify some way of getting the message out to people who don't go on to postsecondary. Even some of those that do are really not that interested, but all postsecondary education facilities have been offered a full presentation. A number have taken me up on that, mostly the AVCs, community colleges -- I've got a community college one this Friday -- SAIT and NAIT, those types of facilities. Athabasca University has; the U of A has. The University of Calgary has not.

MRS. GAGNON: Second question. When you spoke to Alberta Ed, would they be willing just to include a curriculum module, for instance, that would deal with the office of the Ombudsman in Alberta?

3:05

MR. JOHNSON: They haven't as of yet. As I say, this is a program process shifting here. If this committee agrees it's worth pursuing, I will do it. But as I say, I put the money in to say, "Yes, we could do it." Now we'll do the next few steps.

MRS. GAGNON: You see, my perception would be that it's worth while doing, you definitely have a good cause, but I don't know if the video is the right vehicle. There may be other things to explore.

MS BETKOWSKI: I'm on the same point as Yolande. What kind of work would you do, for example, to co-operate with the Human Rights Commission, who I'm sure must get some complaints that really are Ombudsman jurisdiction? That makes me start to think that there may be a way of both agencies and perhaps others working together in this whole goal of giving people the tools they need to not be victims in society.

MR. JOHNSON: I've attended a number of sessions where Human Rights has been on one chair on the platform, myself on another chair on the platform, and Amnesty International on the other chair.

MS BETKOWSKI: That's pretty high company.

MR. JOHNSON: High profile anyway. But there's no program in place to do it. It's an "as invited" process, and I have some concern. We're missing an awful lot of people in getting the message out.

One of the other things, to answer one of your previous comments, is that in all the advertising for a position I do, I put the role of the Ombudsman at the top of the advertisement. That, judging from the responses I get, is well received. So they have the role of the Ombudsman as an advertising educative model as well.

MRS. GAGNON: I think where we're going in this province and everywhere is to linkages: each department, each office not working totally independent of others. If anything, this committee would probably really encourage linking up with Alberta Ed, linking up with whoever, to get this kind of message across rather than doing it totally on your own.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm agreeing with the linkages. I've got to be a little bit cautious in that all these other agencies you're talking about are capable of being investigated by my office.

MRS. GAGNON: That's true. There's a potential conflict then.

MR. JOHNSON: There are potential conflicts, although in honesty we are working together in a number of different areas.

MS BETKOWSKI: If the calls come in and say it's a human rights discriminatory issue, your people would give them over to Human Rights and keep that . . .

MR. JOHNSON: Well, we would advise them to take their complaint to the Human Rights Commission as the most appropriate. If they feel at the completion of the Human Rights involvement that they are still treated unfairly, then they can come and ask me and I can investigate the next agency or the Human Rights Commission.

MS BETKOWSKI: Do you have access to Human Rights files or information?

MR. JOHNSON: Yes. Any file in the province is within my purview.

MS BETKOWSKI: Good. Thank you.

MR. NELSON: Well, I don't want to argue against the idea that it's a good idea, because I think it is a good idea to inform people, advise them how to determine what is available to them. However -- and I always put a "but" or "however" -- in this time of constraints, I look back to another situation that I held. I wanted to go around the province and wave a flag. Then I said, "Gee whiz, if I make people too aware, I've got to go back to the government and ask for more dough so I can serve these clients."

MRS. GAGNON: Keep them ignorant, right? Is that what you're getting at?

MR. NELSON: Not at all. I think it can be done in different ways.

In any event, the problem is that if your workload becomes such, you come back here and say, "Look, I've been advertising so well that I can't handle it, so now we need more people." I'm not suggesting we keep people ignorant -- that's not a really bright comment -- but I think we have to deal with this whole area of the budget and yet provide an immediate service to the community for those who may need it. People will find out where you are or who you are. I'm sure MLAs refer lots of people over there. I've had the occasion to do one or two myself. I am quite frankly looking at asking you to come back with a zero increase in the budget.

I'm going to go back one step because you've concluded that down to these first two items. I wanted to ask the question previously: where did you get the idea that there was a thought around the traps that there was going to be a 3.1 percent increase for staff?

MR. JOHNSON: You're projecting. You're looking at COLA, cost of living increases, and at potential merit increases, and you're also looking in terms of my own. I do have people who have been there for a certain period of time, and by merit alone they take a step up. So you add them all up together and the best guess scenario is coming in at about 3.1 in terms of effect on the budget, not necessarily that people are going to get a 3.1 percent increase in pay.

MR. NELSON: I might have to eat some of that somewhere along the line in this budget, because I think there's going to be a trend somewhere that we're going to look at a zero-base budget this year. Rather than me sit here and say, "Well, look, I think you've got to cut here and here and here," I think maybe if you were to determine what that zero base is and come back and argue, "I can't deal with this because the zero base causes me concern here": that's the argument you're going to have to give. I think in the general text of the overall budget -- and I'm going to conclude all my remarks with

this -- we're going to have to ask you to come back here with a zero base.

MR. JOHNSON: When you're talking zero base, Mr. Nelson, you're talking zero increase rather than zero base, are you?

MR. NELSON: Zero.

MR. JOHNSON: Because zero base implies a different process.

MR. NELSON: One point two nine eight, one hundred. Same as last year.

MR. JOHNSON: That's fine. I'm very prepared and was prepared long before coming in here that that was a distinct potential, but I wanted to put in front of you this particular model and the philosophy. If you say, "No, it cannot be accomplished in this particular budget year; bring it back some other time or look at other methods of doing it," as Mrs. Gagnon has suggested, that's acceptable.

MR. NELSON: You see, I'm not sure I can support an area of \$40,000 for a video in these times of restraint where we're looking for as many dollars to keep this deficit from continuing to grow. If you have an alternative situation, that's great, but maybe in two years' time as things tend to look a little rosier -- if OPEC plans to make an increase in the price of oil and we have a gusher come in here -- there's an opportunity. But at the present time I don't know that that opportunity is to start going out today and getting videos produced at 40 grand.

MR. JOHNSON: I accept your comments. There is a lot of validity to it. Again, it's a policy issue: do we want to move in this direction, or do we not want to move in this direction?

MR. NELSON: I understand.

MR. SIGURDSON: Finally, with respect to 712C, the advertising outreach, I would like to see us move in that direction. I suppose what I'm doing is questioning the methodology. I don't know that a video is any better than a book, and as resource material I think I still prefer printed material in front of me as opposed to having some cold screen with a talking head. Now, I know there are others that would disagree with that, but I think I would like to see a teacher up there utilizing printed material so that they can explain the situation to their students if they choose to use that in the classroom. That's all I've got to say about 712C.

I would like to get back to Data Processing Services and the \$5,500 increase there. This is under 712L. Can you once again outline the reason for the increase?

3:15

MR. JOHNSON: There are some hardware maintenance increases due to some additional computer equipment that we've had to buy. One of the things I liken this area to is: if you buy a car, you must maintain it or it doesn't run anymore. That's basically where we're coming from in terms of some of the cost increases.

The LAN administration: there is still a cost involved in local area network administration. We've been able to keep it as low as possible, and in fact, as I pointed out, we're running at one to one-and-a-half person-years under what other people have with a similar system. In fact, it's been suggested by PWSS that we should have at least one full-time computer person on staff just to deal with the 21 terminals we do have. We have not brought in anybody at this point.

I turned it over to Dixie and let her and her people deal with it on a more part-time basis and just added it to their job description at no increase in pay to Dixie, although it has been suggested by Dixie that that be changed.

There are PWSS charges for storage and data entry that are required, and these are increasing all the time. PWSS charges us on a basis of the time it takes for them to do it, not on a contract basis. So if we were able to go outside, we'd say, "Give us a proposal," and then we could hold them to that proposal. PWSS doesn't have that set of rules. They say, "Well, we think it will take three hours," but if it takes them 12, we pay out. So those are increases that are required.

The second, as I pointed out in terms of Mr. Nelson's comment in terms of some of these printouts: we get 27 printouts every month that are duplicated, and we only need one copy. We're going to work on those, but in the meantime we still are being charged for them by PWSS.

MR. NELSON: I think if you don't work that out, it should come back. I think it's damn stupid. It's stupidity.

MR. JOHNSON: Without saying anything too heavy, I believe I may be able to get some movement on it. One of the problems with PWSS is that the bigger departments need two copies. To change their program to run one copy they claim is more expensive than to give us a copy, but the only thing is that it reflects on my budgets.

MS BETKOWSKI: Then why charge?

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, exactly.

So rather than their eating the cost, I'm eating the cost, and the bottom line is: it's costing.

The final increase we have is the transaction fees: dial-up fees, on-line charges, and amount of data entered, even identification charges that Treasury is now charging for a program for payment of payroll which we didn't have to eat before, and now it's costing us as a department. We are a very small department. Before they used to do it as part of their program. Now we're doing it, and we're paying for it.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay, no room to manoeuvre.

MR. JOHNSON: It's very little room to manoeuvre, very, very little. We've gone back and attempted to renegotiate administration costs and maintenance contracts, and we've been very successful so far, in my opinion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Shall we then move along to group 3.

MR. JOHNSON: Group 3, sir, is 724C, Purchase of Data Processing Equipment, at no increase again. Every once in a while we are required to buy a program, such as when Lotus comes out with a new system, or WordPerfect, Office network comes out with something new. They say, "You have to get this or we won't supply the maintenance to it." So we have just the same amount of moneys required. We are asking for no increase in this area. There may be a reflection -- if somebody wished to go back to the '92-93 forecast, in actual fact we have \$27,400 in there that has already been before this committee. Those expenditures have been approved.

In terms of 724F, the estimate of \$1,000 remains. This basically is the unforeseen fixed assets, where we need a new telephone stand or microfiche cabinets or things that come up throughout the year. At the present time we're not projecting any absolute need for

anything, but it's an area that if in fact something comes up, this is where it would be charged to.

MRS. GAGNON: Overall, if I look at your projected increase, it's only \$10,000 . . .

MR. JOHNSON: It's very, very small.

MRS. GAGNON: . . . yet you have included in here the possibility of the video and so on. So what other items were decreased in order to . . .

MR. JOHNSON: I'm sorry; I don't see \$10,000. I like your calculations, Mrs. Gagnon, but I think we're closing in on about \$80,000.

MRS. GAGNON: Oh, I'm sorry. I was looking at '91-92. Okay. I would just like you, please, to go over again those built-in costs that you have no control over, like COLA, merit, that kind of stuff. Could you go through that again?

MR. JOHNSON: How much in detail would you like it?

MRS. GAGNON: Well, not too much detail -- not personnel or anything -- but just overall why you are faced with that regardless of what we say or what happens.

MR. JOHNSON: Well, there's administrative support. When you take into account that they've been here two years as opposed to one year, there's an automatic step-up in the process. There is a potential COLA. There is a potential agreement in place with the union. Administrative support, 3.1 to 3.3. Opted out and excluded is the same process where if people have been an investigator 1, pay grade 4, when they come up to their yearly evaluation time, they go to pay grade 5 unless I can find that they're incompetent. My position has always been that if they're incompetent, they're gone. So those increases that you really have no control over are in the salary end in specific.

Some of the others where we have no control are in the computer area, specifically in the Treasury Board and the on-line for payroll. That's been a bit of a cost increase, as I've explained under data processing.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you.

MS BETKOWSKI: I've got some general questions, if I may. They perhaps aren't just budget related. I'm interested in the number of complaints, the nature of complaints that come to the Ombudsman.

MR. JOHNSON: Just over 8,000 complaints per year. Approximately 1,000 of those receive full investigations. Many of the complaints that are not fully investigated are those where we get into an investigation and have to withdraw because the people have not completed their appeal process, specifically in the Family and Social Services area or Workers' Compensation Board. They have to complete all appeals before we can be involved in it.

Many of them come in about other departments and other jurisdictions, and while the legislation doesn't specifically mandate, we attempt to direct people as to how best they can get their complaint at least addressed. For instance, we have absolutely no control over almost any department at the federal level; some, under FIGA specifically, where there's potential for 50 percent control or some involvement of my office. So many of those are referrals, advice. Many of them are sitting and listening to people, very

similar in some senses to MLAs, I'm sure, where you're phoned continually about certain issues that you can or cannot do something about.

Of the 1,000 that we deal with, the majority come in the Family and Social Services end, assured income for the severely handicapped being a part of that, any of the social welfare net type programs. The department of the Solicitor General is the next one, and now that they've been mixed with the Attorney General to make Justice, I suspect they will be the second-place winners, if you will, in terms of numbers of complaints. The third one is the Workers' Compensation Board. The fourth is Health. The fifth is the two education components.

MS BETKOWSKI: Are any of them generated from members of the public service?

MR. JOHNSON: Yes.

MS BETKOWSKI: That happens as well.

MR. JOHNSON: Grievance procedures: once the grievance has gone the entire route, it is capable of coming to my office for an investigation to ensure that it's been properly dealt with.

MS BETKOWSKI: I notice there is a provision in the Act that if there's no action taken by the minister on the recommendations of the Ombudsman, then you have the right, as I understand it, to forward the report to the Lieutenant Governor. Is that correct?

MR. JOHNSON: The Lieutenant Governor in Council.

MS BETKOWSKI: The Lieutenant Governor in Council. Okay. Has that ever occurred in your term?

MR. JOHNSON: It hasn't occurred under my jurisdiction. There has been no need to go beyond that level. Usually what happens is that the minister and I will negotiate; we'll meet a number of times. That happens quite a bit in some of the departments. For the most part, I'd say that about 98 percent of the complaint load where I've supported a complaint, I resolve it at the deputy minister level. The minister is usually just advised that something has happened.

MS BETKOWSKI: The third question, if I may, Mr. Chairman. I was involved in the Mental Health Act, as you well know, and the position of the mental health advocate, which of course is basically your jurisdiction within that mental health institutional field. Do you have any discussions with that advocate in terms of what kinds of things he might be seeing? Are the relationships good? I think it's important that you share information.

3:25

MR. JOHNSON: The mental health advocate's position, as you're probably aware, is the result of a recommendation of a former Ombudsman. When the mental health advocate was brought in, there was some concern that the mental health advocate was then taken outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman, the only advocate in the province to have it so happen. All other advocates are within the jurisdiction, but between the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee, the mental health advocate and myself, all the complaints are capable of being at least addressed.

If we wanted to get into the side issue of whether or not a mental health advocate should be within the jurisdiction to investigate, we could get into that, but I'm not sure this is the proper forum to do so.

MS BETKOWSKI: This probably isn't the place to do that.

The difference between the advocate and your legislative authority is that you can investigate a complaint of your own volition; he cannot. That's one of the questions that's obviously having to be monitored: whether that's an appropriate place to have it happen.

MR. JOHNSON: Right.

MS BETKOWSKI: So none of those mental health complaints, then, would come to you, even those which he wasn't going to investigate, because . . .

MR. JOHNSON: That's right. They cannot come to me. The only area they can come to me in mental health is under the Health Facilities Review Committee where the complaint is about the review committee. The review committee is within jurisdiction.

MS BETKOWSKI: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, thanks, Mr. Johnson, for this overview and detail in your budget. We have not been given any specific directive. The intent today was to go over what I guess you felt you really needed.

If the committee wants to give you a directive, I would now ask if any member of the committee wants to make a motion along those lines.

MR. NELSON: Well, I don't know if you need a new motion, but I would move
that the Ombudsman examine a method of bringing back a budget with
a zero increase over the 1992-93 budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do we have a seconder for that motion?
Mr. Fox.

MR. NELSON: If I may. Whether in essence that happens from the direction of the Treasury Board or what have you, I don't know, but I think it's incumbent upon us to be prepared to in fact have that available to them should that occur because I've got a feeling that somewhere shortly there's going to be a crunch to get a budget prepared to put in the Legislature whenever we get in there to sit.

MR. JOHNSON: May I speak to the motion, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. JOHNSON: If the advertising portion or education portion, whichever name we finally end up calling it, is felt to be inappropriate and that is basically, from a policy perspective, taken out of this particular budget, you have a zero increase budget within a few thousand dollars.

MR. FOX: Just by explanation, because a similar motion was made with the Ethics Commissioner. I think our purpose as a committee is just to have the opportunity to review a budget with no projected increase and discuss with you the implications of that according to your recommendations on the office. That may mean that either one or the other budget or something in between is what's eventually approved, but in order for us to assess what a zero percent increase would mean in terms of your operation we need to have you make those recommendations to us before we can discuss it. I think that's what we mean here.

MR. JOHNSON: Just in the bottom line is: if this flow is not felt to be appropriate this year, I'm coming in with a zero increase.

MRS. GAGNON: If I might just ask a question, then, before speaking to the motion. If you come in with a zero percent increase, that means you're eating that 3.17 percent that's built in with COLA and that kind of thing.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes.

MRS. GAGNON: Okay. I would support the motion as well in principle and indicate that I think the budget you've prepared for presentation certainly shows a lot of restraint and hold-the-line all over the place and that you must be commended for that. I would be interested as well to see the zero percent budget but also to try and understand from you when you make that next presentation what the impact then is on the function of your office. We don't want to cripple your mandate; I think that's important to note as well. As long as the office is still healthy and can function adequately without increases, that's fine.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm in a position to say that if this video is not given, I'm prepared and the budget is here at a zero percent increase. It will not impact on the operational side of the office. We've been very cautious about spending, so we can eat those increases.

MR. NELSON: First of all, Harley has been extremely responsible over the years he's been Ombudsman as far as dealing with the budget and his control of expenditures within the department. I think all of us agree with that. I commend you on that again.

The comment you made with regard to a policy decision with regard to the \$40,000 in educational: I'm not sure we're dealing with that as a policy decision at this point in time. I think we're dealing with the fiscal restraints that are with us. Insofar as policy is concerned, certainly we don't have the dollars to develop some of these policies, or new policies, as you could refer to them. From my perspective I wouldn't like us to think, "Well, we're cutting it out because we don't like the policy," or something of that nature. I think that the more information we can give people to be better informed is always a welcome thing. It's a matter of how much information at what period of time and at what cost; we have a responsibility to those people who are paying the bills too. I'm basically looking at it from a point of fiscal responsibility rather than necessarily chewing after a policy, because I wouldn't like to be seen to be doing that as such. Certainly fiscal responsibility is something I guess we all have to address at this time.

MS BETKOWSKI: I take a little different view. It seems to me that if this committee, having the trust in you that it obviously does, says to you, "Come in with a zero budget," how you build that is really something we entrust to you. At least that's the way I would prefer. If you were to say, "I can get better value out of the resources we spend by doing an education project rather than having as many investigators as I do," that would be a judgment I would think this committee should leave to you. So I think the motion is the zero percent. What I hear you saying -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- is, "If zero is what it is, then take off the so-called advertising portion." That would be the preferred budget you would be coming in with.

MR. JOHNSON: That's correct.

MR. SIGURDSON: When you came into the position, you had a strong outreach component; you wanted to travel the province and make Albertans aware. I think that when the subcommittee, the

hiring committee of this standing committee, made a recommendation to have you fill the position of Ombudsman, they did so because they wanted to have that outreach component. I want to make sure that we still have that kind of commitment to outreach and education.

I guess the concern I have was the method we would employ in getting the message out. When you come back to the committee with a change in budget, rather than have something completely deleted -- this portion that you call advertising, that I call education -- what I would like to see are different methods of reaching out to the community. Perhaps it would be less expensive to put it out in a brochure to schools. I may be very wrong in thinking that a printed brochure or pamphlet would be cheaper. It could very well be that a video would be cheaper and more utilized. So I would like to be able to look at that. I don't want to drop that continued outreach which I think is important: the education of young Albertans so that they will know what rights they have, access to your office. I guess I would hope that when you come back, if you have a budgetary proposal, there are some of the options that I can look at that deal with educational outreach included in there. I would like to see that continued in there. Even though it's not part of the mandate of the office currently, it's something you've undertaken and it's something I appreciate.

3:35

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Are we ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion? Those opposed? Carried.

Once again I want to thank you for the job well done. We don't know just how soon we have to have our final budget in to Treasury, but I'm pretty sure it won't be too long. So we will invite you back with your new proposal and have an opportunity to weigh that against this. We'll look forward to that discussion.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, committee members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: For the members of the committee, that concludes our business for today. Tomorrow morning we meet at 10:30 again, and I have a motion for adjournment from Stan Nelson.

MS BETKOWSKI: Before we adjourn, can I just ask my question about standard format on budget submissions? Has it ever been contemplated by this committee, or do they just all come in? I'm used to looking at Treasury submissions which are all kinds of standard format. It might be helpful for both the offices that we meet with as well as for the members of the committee. I know it's not going to happen this year, but in a subsequent year it might.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I certainly had the same difficulty when I saw this. We have a number of items that we have not completed from the past, so I wonder if we couldn't include that as another item we must deal with in one of the upcoming discussions.

[The committee adjourned at 3:37 p.m.]

