

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

[9:08 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, ladies and gentlemen, if we may proceed, we indeed have a quorum. It's the understanding of the Chair, unless it's declared otherwise, that we now move to section 5, Government Members. Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I think we should have, if it's possible, some general discussions about all the budgets from 5 to 8 in general terms and then hopefully handle them as a unit in a motion. If it's awkward to have general discussion without a motion, I would be prepared to make a motion, but hopefully we could have some discussion about it before I make a motion that they all be handled together.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, let's try a general discussion for a while and see how it goes. Is it agreed by the committee that we have general discussion on 5, 6, 7, and 8?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Do you want to lead off the general discussion, Cypress-Redcliff?

MR. HYLAND: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would hope that we can decide today, as we usually have, on a global amount on the budgets as shown in here. The only concern I have with it -- and I know there are problems with the way the numbers are kept -- is the lumping together of the leaders' allowances in with the caucus budgets. I'm not saying that they shouldn't be lumped. I think they should be looked at as a number, but they should be listed separately. Other than that, I think what we give one caucus should follow through on all the others, as we have done in previous years. Thank you.

MR. WRIGHT: On that point, I do note that for the purposes of the budget, I think that since there's an extra minister on the government side now, that would appear to reduce their budget by one, so to speak. Yet it remains the same. The other caucuses have the same members. Would someone like to comment on that?

MR. BOGLE: Based on the principle of what we did last year, Mr. Chairman, and going from recollection, we did indeed look at a figure of \$32,000 per elected member. We allowed the opposition parties to include their leaders in that calculation and then, on top of that, set a figure for the leaders' office which was based on a formula. We took the average cost of a minister's office and then set the Leader of the Official Opposition's budget at the average cost of a minister's office. The leader of the Liberal Party had a portion of that and the leader of the Representative Party had a portion of what the Liberal leader had received. What the hon. member is pointing out is certainly true in the sense of the principle that we established.

I also recall the discussion last year that ministers' office costs would be coming down although we could not estimate what it would be. Therefore, we went to the previous fiscal year to set those figures. I would ask the question: how much did the ministers' offices costs go down for the current fiscal year, and would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona apply the same principle so that the leaders' office budgets for the three opposition parties would go down in direct relationship to the ministers' office budgets, as they fell from the previous year?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Strathcona, on this point.

MR. WRIGHT: I believe the answer there is that there was a global reduction which included the leaders' amount last year, was there not?

MR. BOGLE: It's my understanding, Mr. Chairman, that the reduction last year was in two parts. We reduced the members' allowance from \$40,000 per member to \$32,000 per member, which is a 20 percent reduction. With the leaders' allocation we used a figure of approximately 5 percent, but we tied the Leader of the Official Opposition's budget to the average cost of all the ministers' offices.

So all I am saying is that based on the principle we followed last year -- and I'm not sure we should do that again, but it's certainly open for discussion -- should we be following a zero percent budget across the board for the caucuses this year? Or should we be following through and indeed dropping the government offices by \$32,000, because there's one less member now, in that Mr. Stevens is now a member of the cabinet? If that holds true, then I'm interested in discussion on the offices of the leaders of the various opposition parties in relation to the ministers' offices.

MR. WRIGHT: I still haven't quite followed. Last year there was a 5 percent reduction in the leaders' allowance, I gather. Did that not itself parallel the reduction in the average ministers' offices?

MR. BOGLE: No. My understanding was that what we did was set the Leader of the Official Opposition's budget at the average cost of a minister's office for the 1986-87 fiscal year, and I think that if we check the minutes, we'll find that at least one member indicated that if the ministers' offices had their budget reduced for the 1987-88 fiscal year in keeping with the government's guidelines, in fact that figure could be even lower. But we couldn't, as a committee -- we had no crystal ball or way of knowing what Executive Council would be doing with those office budgets, so we set it on the past year's budget. Would a short coffee break be helpful?

MR. WRIGHT: That's not necessary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, following a series of discussions yesterday, I'd like to request of the committee that they replace the document they have currently in their binders under Official Opposition -- that's item 6 -- with the document that Louise will be handing out in a moment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's been distributed. Do you wish to speak to it, Edmonton-Highlands?

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think it's self-explanatory. It calls for no change from the 1987-88 budget and forecast, and the reason this is being proposed and distributed is because it conforms to the proposals from the other caucuses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: It was more a point of information. I am

pleased to see -- well, I'm not sure I'm pleased. I had sort of dreams at night that maybe that 20 percent raise would go through, and of course we would tie ourselves onto the cart, but you've withdrawn that, more in light of realism. I thought I'd point out what the hon. Member for Taber-Warner mentioned: the tie-in of the leaders' budget. But also I think what we might cut there, we make up in the roundabout, because with the members cut by 18 or 20 percent, that was a rather draconian cut. So if you argued that the leaders' cut should come down a bit, then I think on the basis of what averages have been done in the government in the last year, you'd have to argue that on average the nonleaders' budget came up, because certainly the government did not cut their budget by 18 percent last year.

So I don't know. I think we're just going round and round, chasing our tail around the haystack here. If you cut one area, you've got to come up in another if you're going to use averages. I think the budgets as submitted now by all the parties seem to be quite reasonable. It's in line with -- it's actually a little better than in line. With no increase and taking inflation into account, you're really taking a 3 or 4 percent cut, so it looks reasonable. If I could figure some way of cutting the Minister of the Environment's, I would, but I can't think of any way.

MR. KOWALSKI: I think, Mr. Chairman, that the position now adopted by the Official Opposition is a realistic one. It certainly keeps in line with the initiative taken by the government members, notwithstanding the statements advocated by the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, which all of us will ignore anyway.

MR. BOGLE: I just wanted to indicate that I think a zero budget is a very reasonable approach when one considers that between 80 and 90 percent of the costs incurred by the government caucus -- and I assume the same ratio would apply to the Official Opposition, the Liberal opposition, and the Representative opposition -- are manpower costs. When we look at the manpower components in General Administration and in House Services, two elements that we've been dealing with in past meetings, we see increases in those areas. I think that zero percent fully recognizes the restraint we're all under in our respective caucuses, and I would support it.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, listening to the discussion, I think now I could make my motion that when we deal with the budgets of the caucuses, we deal with them as a unit; for example, the increase would be the same through the caucuses. I would move that the four caucuses' budgets remain at the same amount approved for the '87-88 budget fiscal year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Having heard the motion, is there a call for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried.

We will now return to other items in the general overall budget area of the Legislative Assembly, where indeed my staff wish we had got zero instead of what we're going through. During the course of the last series of meetings there were a number of areas that were brought up with regard to the section on General Administration. Dr. McNeil, do you have that document ready for distribution that shows a \$77,000 reduction? Perhaps we could have a five-minute coffee break, ladies and gentlemen.

[The committee recessed from 9:26 a.m. to 9:35 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. If the committee could reassemble please, the committee is back in session. Is there a motion?

MR. BOGLE: With the indulgence of the Chair, Mr. Chairman, could we give another moment for several of our colleagues to return?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, ladies and gentlemen, we're back in. A motion from Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, I move that we now resolve ourselves in-camera.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

[The committee met in-camera from 9:37 a.m. to 10:12 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: [Not recorded]

MR. WRIGHT: [Not recorded] and therefore simply to put that project on hold might represent a loss to the taxpayer; i.e., the costs already committed with no result to be shown and a false idea that somehow we were saving money at the same time. I think we need more information on that, the information being: what of the \$31,634 is simply a charge transferred from another department where the personnel would be anyway and would not be substituted if they worked on the project and (b) whether the necessary software could not be had without cost. I bear in mind that we're employing the co-ordinator anyway, so it seems that on that one item we should not be sweeping it in with any larger sum that we say should be axed, because it does not represent a saving to the taxpayer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So delay on this general area.

MR. WRIGHT: That's what I'm suggesting, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Actually, I don't need to say anything. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The direction is to delay further discussion on General Administration possible reductions until the next meeting. Take that as a motion, hon. member?

MR. WRIGHT: Yes, I'll so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All those in favour of the motion? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

The next area would be under MLA Administration. Members would find that you have blue sheets, on new blue sheet page 2. This then reflects, Clerk, what we were ...

DR. McNEIL: This sheet reflects the change to the air travel order limiting the number of in-province trips, other than between the constituency and Edmonton or home and Edmonton, to five trips per year. [interjection]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Try again.

DR. McNEIL: The first item on page 2 reflects the change in Members' Services orders with the addition of the restriction of five within-province trips per year. Our estimate of the savings there is about \$11,000, \$12,000 per year as a result of that restriction.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The whole sheet is basically the budget projection, taking into account the previous action of the committee two weeks ago.

Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, could I ask that this page be held, as we are going to meet again to discuss and wrap up other budgetary items? There may still be some consideration on this particular page, but we're not yet at a point of making any recommendation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So this is basically a motion to table. I see nods of agreement. All those in favour? Carried unanimously.

Next blue sheet is page 4. Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: Yes. The change here reflects the change in the MLA Communication Allowance formula to reflect the January 1, 1988, postal rate increase. The formula was changed -- and this is based on the way the formula was changed in the past -- from .7860 as a multiplier to .8086 as a multiplier, increasing the overall Communication Allowance to \$811,485 and the amount allocated to Freight and Postage to \$327,945 from \$304,260.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So it's a best-estimate scenario in case there's any more postal increases.

Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: What was the budget last year for these items? This is the '87-88 budget.

DR. McNEIL: \$387,501.

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, and so the forecast equals the budget once again.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Motion to approve? Further discussion?

Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: A quick question. Can we from now on, because we always seem to forget and get mixed up on this forecast, put "budgeted" or something like that? "Forecast" almost seems like it's something different.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thirty-five below and a 30-mile-an-hour wind for the next 10 weeks. Okay? We'll take that into account. Thank you. But that's just been trying to keep it in line with the Treasury documents, isn't it?

Okay. Is there a motion to approve? Thank you Edmonton-Highlands. Call for the question.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please signify. Op-

posed? Carried. Thank you.

Page 6: revised to show a minus .6. Any additional comments? Motion to approve, Edmonton-Highlands. Call for the question.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

MR. TAYLOR: Just a point of information on that particular issue. It's not to change anything, but I was wondering if there is a more simplified method of giving instructions on how to use the extended dialing system out to the... Pardon? [interjection] Actually, I'm trying to get the staff to use the government rented lines. Under the system that has been put out, it seems to be a little difficult. I was just wondering if there isn't a simplified system, whether it be a map or something with colours that you could put up beside the phone so they know what number to call into each area. I think there would probably be considerable savings in the phone thing in that way. Because as it is now, in a written thing, it takes a Philadelphia lawyer, and of course maybe that's what you're supposed to do: retain one of the government lawyers to interpret it to figure out how to make the phone system work using the government lines. It's easy to figure out Calgary, but after that it gets difficult.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm sure my staff are only too happy to meet with you at any time, and we'll see if they can come down and enjoy a cup of coffee with you and see if maybe there's some way to help out.

MR. TAYLOR: Just the thought of all that equipment out there not being used bothers me as an engineer. I like to see it used.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But, hon. member, I understand you're very good at using the telephone.

Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Something for somebody who just sponsored the motion to approve. I have a question after the fact. Under item 2 on the blue page marked number 6, AGT Credit Cards. Can I just ask, is that reduction because of direct dialing? Is that what that is?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MS BARRETT: That's great. That's unbelievable.

DR. McNEIL: That's an estimate.

MS BARRETT: If it was even half of that, it would still be a heck of a reduction.

DR. McNEIL: What we did then in 3 was increase the MLA Tolls, Residential Installations as a result of that reduction.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okeydoke. Moving over to House Services. I'm still on the right blue sheet? No? House Services, page 6, now reflects a minus 12 percent. This was on pages 6, 7, and 8. Basically, what we've done is take into account the direction of the Member for Barrhead about reducing the confer-

ence costs and, Clerk, what was the total reduction?

DR. McNEIL: The total reduction came to \$28,000, which I believe was the target for the reduction: \$28,313.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the committee directed and we responded with great care and devotion and alacrity. All of that's wasted on the Minister of the Environment at the moment. In actual fact, do you want to do these pages individually or a total? All righty.

Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: For clarification, Mr. Chairman, did we get the appropriate motions under MLA Administration to give approval to the changes?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We did on page . . . Page 2 was held; page 4 was passed by motion, MLA Administration. Page 6 was passed by motion. That was that whole section on MLA Administration. Okay?

House Services, page 6. We have a motion to approve the revised page 6. Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I can make a motion to approve the revised pages 6, 7, and 8.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Discussion or call for the question.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Call for the question. Those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried. Okay, House Services, pages 6, 7, and 8 are now approved.

For members' information, page 12 in House Services, that's where we had some discussion with regard to the ACCESS Network and QCTV. Yesterday I met with the production manager from QCTV, and together he and I are going to meet next week, we hope, with Mr. Senchuk from ACCESS Network. So after that meeting then I'll be in a better position to report back to the committee at our next meeting.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, where are we, please? Are we on . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're at Speaker's Office, and the updated information is in your folder there. I would like us to hold on to that one for the moment.

Section 9, Legislative Committees. Now, the information in our binder today, does this show the reflection of the changes of yesterday, Louise? Okay. So that isn't . . .

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, something's wrong with the speakers on this side again. We're having great difficulty hearing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've moved over to 9, Legislative Committees, but we don't have the document here to reflect yesterday's. I think what's happening here is that we're sort of over-running our own heels. Maybe what we should do is hold the Speaker's Office and Legislative Committees to our next meeting when we've got the documentation in. *Hansard* was fine; it was approved. Legislature Library: you now have the updated

information which came as a consequence of yesterday's discussions, and you can either deal with that now -- I would see it as being pro forma -- or else we can hold that till our meeting as well.

MR. KOWALSKI: Agree to hold it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hold. Agreed. After that we will all feel more settled if we've got them together.

MR. BOGLE: Just a question. If the material is here, why aren't we dealing with it today? For clarification to the members, my understanding is that we are not dealing with the Speaker's Office or indeed Leg. Committees because the print material is not yet here, because we dealt with the Leg. Committees yesterday. The Leg. Library, on the other hand, we do have a document in front of us which accurately reflects the financial impact as a result of the decision made in the committee yesterday. Why not deal with the issue today?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Then agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A motion by Taber-Warner to approve the budget as circulated. Thank you. A call for the question? Sorry. Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Chairman, this is a fait accompli obviously, so we might as well rubber-stamp it. I just would leave one message with the members of this committee: I think it's in the best interest not only of members of the Assembly but for all Albertans who rely on an informed decision-making body within the Assembly that the division of library research services be restored next year.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, we're hearing about half of what's being said. Either let's get the system working or move back to the Carillon Room. Because I heard half of what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands said. [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Whoa, gang. I think what's up is that in the case of Edmonton-Highlands, she's speaking this way and the mike is there, so maybe we need to put on . . . Console operator, are you able to put on both Edmonton-Strathcona's and Edmonton-Highlands' microphones? There we go. Thanks. Let's try again now, please.

MS BARRETT: He can do two at once? Modern technology, huh, Doug? What I was saying is that -- is this better; can you all hear? -- this is really a fait accompli as a result of yesterday's motion, which I did not support. But I would like to leave one message with members of this committee, and that is that the Alberta public, I think, relies on an informed decision-making body within this Chamber and, in the interest of serving that concern, that we consider reinstating the Leg. Library research services next year when we're contemplating budgets.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: Yes, I just wish to add, Mr. Chairman, what I said yesterday, that this is a partisan and selective attack on the

opposition's ability to do their job and unworthy of this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Mine is a short point. I know the Member for Edmonton-Highlands -- I notice the microphones work pretty well if you're getting up close to them.

Just a short point: I don't intend rubber-stamping it even though it's a foregone conclusion. I intend to vote against it. I think it was a rather heavy-handed way of trying to balance the budget and something that was obviously an attack against the opposition, when 67 percent of the use of this facility was made by opposition MLAs. So I intend to vote quite clearly against it, and I want to be recorded as that too.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: My point with respect to rubber-stamping is that I know that I'm going to be voting against it. I'm in a minority in that situation, and I know the majority is going to rubber-stamp it. That's all I needed to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Taber-Warner, summation.

MR. BOGLE: Just a reminder to members that seven out of 10 provinces do not enjoy this service. We're in a period of economic restraint. We have to live within our means, and that means that members are going to have to do their own work in the library.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? Thank you. Motion carries. Recorded 7 to 3.

Date books, ladies and gentlemen. I think the last day of February was suggested as the date of the next meeting: Monday, the 29th, at 1 p.m. At that time, perhaps we will be doing the tidy up of the budget plus other items that have come up in terms of correspondence or general housekeeping matters.

MR. BOGLE: I think we had one or two items that were non-budgetary that are still pending from our last regular meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. And with that to be done, was there any intent to do any of that today, or hold all of that until the 29th?

MR. BOGLE: We're not ready for it today, but let the next

meeting be a budget meeting, and if time permits, we then go on to other matters.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. Thank you.
Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if before we adjourn, we could consider -- I'll make the motion -- that when next we meet and thereafter, we do so in the Carillon Room or room 512.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fine. Go for it, folks. It's your decision.

MR. BOGLE: As long as the speakers are working.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I put it to the committee.

Because of the sound system -- I think they've been doing some work on the sound system, have they not, Doug? You don't know.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Chairman, I don't think there's anything wrong with the sound system. These are directional mikes. They're made to beam for you standing up. I'll admit that for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands that might be difficult even then. But nevertheless, the thing is coming through as a triangle this way, and if you get your head into that path, the voice should come out.

MS BARRETT: I need to contest the putative theory of the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, because I am sitting down right now and it still wasn't working adequately. I for one can be most assuredly directly across from this microphone when I'm sitting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any other items of serious business to be considered today? All right. I notice the Member for Edmonton-Highlands didn't say anything about cutting the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon off at the knees to redesign him.
Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, [inaudible] earlier today, Mr. Chairman, and I realized just as it was coming out of my mouth that I was too short to pull it off. It had no effect.

I move we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please shuffle your papers and stand and leave. Opposed? Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 10:37 a.m.]

