

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

[7:30 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, ladies and gentlemen. The first meeting of Members' Services Committee is called to order. It is indeed unusual to call it while we're sitting in the House. We prefer to have it outside of the House, but we've had a request, primarily from the New Democrat House leader, that we deal with at least two of the main issues on our schedule tonight. So that's why we're going through our time constraints, and we can also adjust here so that hopefully we can deal with most of these issues, which seem to be relatively noncontroversial. As soon as the House is out, I would hope we could plan on having at least one day almost immediately after the House adjourns so we could deal with some of the other issues and have more time to be able to deal with them.

In time past the Members' Services Committee, especially from '86, was able to make great progress, in my opinion, in terms of better fulfilling its mandate with regard to being of more service to the members, especially with regard to not only their constituency offices and their ability to serve their constituents but also to look at some pretty important issues with regard to their own salaries and benefits.

So thank you for coming.

Approval of Agenda.

MS BARRETT: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Thank you.

I take it no additional business then?

All right. With respect to item 3, Bonus Points, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll explain the reason for this coming back before us. We dealt with it two years ago, and while there was consensus in the decision, the minutes reflected a more strict motion than that which had been contemplated at the table. What specifically this would accommodate is Ray Martin's request for out-of-province travel as a result of his being the Leader of the Official Opposition. He is a couple of times a year asked to travel to other points in the country. Because he does fly within the province, he accumulates bonus points, which I suspect can only be -- I don't know, but I believe -- used within Alberta unless there is special approval given. So that's the background to this request.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Questions?

MRS. BLACK: Special approval from whom, Pam?

MS BARRETT: From the Speaker.

MRS. BLACK: Oh, I see. Okay.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I don't have any problems with what's being said here, with the exception of one qualification. Why just the Official Opposition? Why not allow each caucus to determine themselves as to how they want to utilize

those points? For example, if we in the Liberal caucus want to turn our points over to Laurence Decore to allow him to travel, because he gets requests as well to go to various parts of the country or throughout the province to speak.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS BARRETT: This has only to do with the points that an individual accumulates. For instance, a member of Executive Council who travels on her or his duties is allowed to accumulate those points and then use them for flying for other duties. It's not like this allows transfers, although that was contemplated a long time ago, but I guess I'm not supposed to raise that now and, in fact, won't.

DR. ELLIOTT: Mr. Chairman, I didn't realize that anybody was accumulating points. I thought it was a no-no.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's been allowed by Members' Services Committee, but it's supposed to be used on official business.

MS BARRETT: Oh, yes.

DR. ELLIOTT: Only on official, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Only on official, not for personal or spousal. We get some pretty weird and wonderful requests coming through the office, I'll tell you. Any other comment?

MRS. MIROSH: I don't understand what the problem is with the Leader of the Opposition getting permission from the Speaker to do this. Has he refused?

MS BARRETT: Well, yes, but because the motion that we dealt with about a year and a half ago... While the discussion was very clear about it, in fact the motion, if you read it -- and I don't have it with me -- would make it pretty difficult for the Speaker to rule otherwise. This would basically put the decision into a motion form that's clear. When the business is related to the official job of the Leader of the Official Opposition, as opposed to the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, for instance, then there would be no question, but he would have to prove that he was on official business and so forth, just like any one of us would have to if we want to use the accumulated points for other air travel.

MRS. BLACK: What classifies as official business? Okay. More questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's one of those things. It can't be purely for a political party issue, for example.

MS BARRETT: Right.

MRS. BLACK: So it's representing the government of Alberta at some form of a function?

MS BARRETT: Well, in this case it would not be that.

DR. McNEIL: The Legislative Assembly.

MRS. BLACK: I mean, the province of Alberta at whatever?

That's official business?

MR. WICKMAN: Going to the FCM, speaking on behalf of the party I would assume would qualify.

MS BARRETT: It hasn't hitherto.

MR. WICKMAN: Or the AUMA?

MR. BOGLE: Well, I can see part of the difficulty we have, Mr. Chairman. In that while members of the former committees have some knowledge of the subject matter as we discussed it on a number of occasions and tried very hard to find a way that would allow members to accumulate points and to use them for some specific purposes, approved by the Speaker but with guidelines set by the committee, it may be a lot to ask new members of the committee, who don't have the same background, to come forward today. I think Percy's raised a good point relative to the Liberal caucus. The reason this item is here today is because the Leader of the Official Opposition would like to travel out of province for an event which, as I understand it, would otherwise be approved, but because of the wording -- and if that's not correct, please, someone correct me -- of the motion of a year and a half ago ...

MS BARRETT: Yeah.

MR. BOGLE: ... the use is restricted and it cannot be done. That's one of the reasons we've having the extraordinary meeting at this time. It may be that we would, if indeed the committee wishes to approve this, want to come back to the issue in a broader sense. I'll leave it at that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the Chair would interpret it that we should then have a motion saying that without establishing any kind of precedent, we then allow the Leader of the Official Opposition to travel to Whitehorse for this upcoming conference, and we'll deal with the matter at greater length.

MS BARRETT: That would be fine with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. A motion by Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Yeah. I think I should formally withdraw this motion then, with the approval of the members, and move that the Leader of the Official Opposition be allowed to use his air bonus points to travel as the Leader of the Official Opposition to a conference in Whitehorse at the end of August.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Unanimous consent to withdraw the original motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.
Now the motion before us. Is there a call for the question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. WICKMAN: Would you not include the portion, Mr. Chairman and Pam, that the whole matter be reviewed at a further meeting?

MS BARRETT: Yeah. Oh, that's understood, but that doesn't have to be done by motion; you just get that on the agenda.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, could we just be informed what the exact conference is?

MS BARRETT: Yes. It is a conference of the Official Opposition leaders from Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, at the request of the government leader in Yukon.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Call for the ...

MR. KOWALSKI: Sorry. This is not viewed as a political event? That's inherent in all of this.

MS BARRETT: Well, I can pop back in if you like. Sure. Inevitably, no matter what you do when you're in this business, you're dealing with politics, but the issues on the table are relative to the economic development pursuits of the government in Yukon. In other words, Ray would not be invited if he were not the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. HYLAND: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Call for the question. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried. Thank you. It's on the agenda for the next meeting.

MRS. BLACK: Could I make a request, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Surely.

MRS. BLACK: I don't have a feel for these bonus travel things. Could I get a breakdown of how this is administered or what happens with it? Because I really don't have a feel for it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

MRS. BLACK: Before the next meeting?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, we'll put together a decision item on it with more specific information.

MR. BOGLE: Yeah, background for all members.

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Good idea.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Item 4, constituency offices. There is a draft page there giving you the background, decision requested of Public Works, Supply and Services. The present listing in your little green book which helps you as a member shows you on the left-hand side; the request is to move to the right-hand column.

DR. McNEIL: This list is based on discussion with members, with our administrative staff, as well as the staff of Public Works, Supply and Services, in terms of what is a reasonable list to be provided from surplus.

MRS. BLACK: We have that much surplus?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: The proposed new list says "pamphlet rack." I remember that when I started a constituency office, they considered a pamphlet rack as something that holds six pamphlets. That could be defined better. You might get into what the request indeed will be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Member for Barrhead, in your capacity as minister in charge of surplus furniture as well as everything else.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, I find it interesting, Mr. Chairman, that all these consultations have sort of ignored the minister responsible. It seems to me I'm charged with something called fiscal responsibility. Do I take it that this particular motion here -- who will be paying for this?

MRS. BLACK: Doesn't it say "surplus"? Do you have this much furniture hanging around?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, but I may very well be working on some other policies in terms of ensuring that the deficit of this province be reduced.

MS BARRETT: It says "surplus," Ken.

MR. KOWALSKI: Nothing is surplus unless it's declared surplus. I find it of interest, Mr. Chairman, that there's a motion here . . .

MRS. MIROSH: What is it, the garbage cans, that got you upset here, from two to three?

MR. KOWALSKI: Yeah, that's right. There's a motion here saying that certain things are going to be declared surplus, without any consultation with the minister involved. I find that really of considerable interest. It's not the point of what's on the list.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I was given to understand that conversation had taken place.

MR. KOWALSKI: No, no; I don't think that's true that there's been any consultation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, it's obvious it's not true.

MR. KOWALSKI: Obviously, it isn't true.

DR. McNEIL: The conversation took place with some senior managers in the department.

MS BARRETT: Ken, have another look at the other one I drafted; maybe you'll like that one better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Do I get the drift that this one is about to be tabled to the next meeting?

MRS. BLACK: I think so.

MR. KOWALSKI: That would probably be in order.

MR. BOGLE: As an MLA who doesn't have a constituency office with Public Works, Supply and Services furnishings in it, possibly I can speak to this from a completely unbiased point of view. It seems to me that when you deal with lists, as has been pointed out by the Member for Cypress-Redcliff, you get into definitions, and what one person considers adequate another might not. Again, looking at the list, it appears that the main items that are not on the current list, setting aside quantities, would be the bookcase or bookcases and -- is there a pamphlet rack? I'm wondering. I note that Pam has also circulated a proposed motion. She's got really an adjudication process that would involve either the Speaker or the minister.

I'm wondering if we could do two things: if we could add the bookcase to the current list of items so that we can meet the needs of the member who wants a bookcase now, and strike a three-member committee consisting of the sponsor of the motion, Pam, and the minister, who should have been involved in the consultation, along with Percy, so that all three caucuses are represented on this committee and work closely with David and his staff and report back to us at our next meeting. Can we meet the immediate needs of the bookcase in that way and still allow the committee to come back with a recommendation to us?

MR. McINNIS: Probably wouldn't break the bank.

MR. BOGLE: If that's in order, I'll . . .

MS BARRETT: Sure. I'd like to explain something. I mean, this is really bizarre: a meeting to get a bookcase for one MLA.

MR. BOGLE: No, no.

MS BARRETT: I know; I know. It's just that there is an explanation. The reason this is in front of us is because the current Members' Services orders do not allow any flexibility beyond a certain allocation, and because of that the Minister of Public Works hasn't even got the right to give this particular member an extra bookcase, because of our own order. So even though he's got a warehouse that's got extra bookcases and, you know, the commonsense thing would be for him to say yes and hand one out, he can't because of the strictness of our own order.

MR. BOGLE: Pam, many members will recall that a member of the Assembly wanted a high-backed chair because of a neck problem and was told that wasn't acceptable, that MLAs didn't qualify for high-backed chairs. So we've evolved; the system's come along. If that's in order, Mr. Chairman, I'll make the motion. I'll make a motion that we add a bookcase to the current list of approved items and that we strike the three-member sub-committee, with the concurrence of the three members.

MS BARRETT: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we have it as two separate and distinct motions? One is the bookcase, and then we'll go to the

other.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. WICKMAN: I just have one question. Would the mandate of the subcommittee be such that it could look at items other than just the furniture? For example, the fax machine question: I want to raise that one again. So the subcommittee could look at the question of fax machines?

MR. KOWALSKI: There are no surplus fax machines.

MR. WICKMAN: There may not be surplus . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hold it folks. We have a motion dealing with a bookcase. Call for the question regarding the bookcase.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of bookcases, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries.

The second one is a matter of striking the committee that is proposed by Taber-Warner. Three members, to include Edmonton-Highlands, Edmonton-Whitemud, and the Member for Barrhead.

MR. DAY: Can we ask if each of the members concur?

MS BARRETT: Yep, I do.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Chairman, it would be a long time before I'll have an opportunity to spend, prioritize my time on this very important issue, so perhaps it might be more advantageous for the efficiency of the committee if one other member were to serve in my place and just provide me with the list so I can then determine what our surplus stock is in the light of some of the initiatives we will be taking with respect to surplus furniture lists.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The minister declines to serve on the committee for understandable reasons.

MR. HYLAND: Taber-Warner volunteered.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Taber-Warner volunteered. You're right. Thank you.

Call for the question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Motion carries.

The matter of fax machines. We have some other references and material within our own minutes, and we'll supply that in-

formation to you, Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, as to what the process is.

MR. WICKMAN: I have it here, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Fax machines have to be bought by members out of their constituency allowances at the moment. Thank you.

Next item deals, in spite of what it says in the agenda -- first, the matter of Athabasca-Lac La Biche. Taber-Warner, speaking to that issue please.

MR. BOGLE: Members may recall that some time ago Athabasca-Lac La Biche was removed as an eligible electoral division where the member could use a charter aircraft, and that was done specifically at the request of the member at the time. The current member for the constituency has requested that that privilege or right be reinstated, and he's given some reasons because of distances within the constituency. I've researched it to satisfy myself as to why the order was amended to take Athabasca-Lac La Biche out of the approved constituency list. The other constituencies include Fort McMurray, Dunvegan, Lesser Slave Lake, and Peace River.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This then would regularize and cover the north country?

MR. BOGLE: This would bring it back into the fold.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And you so move. Further discussion? Call for the question. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Thank you. The motion carries unanimously.

The next item, Residential Telephones. Taber-Warner, this is another regularization motion, I understand.

MR. BOGLE: Under the wording of the present order, telephones which are installed and the monthly charge covered by Leg. Assembly can only be accessed if indeed the residence is within the boundaries of the constituency the member represents. We do have some members whose normal place of residence is outside of the constituency they represent. A request has been made for the installation of a telephone in one such case. The Assembly is not able to provide it, and therefore it's recommended that the intent of the original order was clearly to improve the service and indeed to lower the cost for the Leg. Assembly, because the alternative is that the member will continue to use the operator assistance dialing, which has proven to be more expensive than a regular, direct dialing process. That's the background to this situation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Then, that would necessitate a change to our Members' Services orders. Okay. Discussion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question

MR. CHAIRMAN: On the motion by Taber-Warner, those in favour please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Motion carries unanimously. Thank you.

Other business. Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm not sure; do I call you Mr. Chairman or Mr. Speaker?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Chairman in this one.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I've got three items here for information I just want circulated to be considered at the next meeting. They relate to the inclusion of constituency staff to the benefits package. I'll just pass them around; if you'll just hang on to them. The first one deals with what happens in Saskatchewan. The second one deals with our existing contract, which clearly states that full benefits are not extended to constituency staff. The last one deals with the minutes where the Members' Services Committee had dealt with this item before.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those are the three items for future discussion?

MR. BOGLE: Of course, other items could be added by the Speaker at the request of members. We don't need to prepare our agenda tonight.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, prior to the next meeting could we have the agenda sent out to us ahead of time with the backups?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's indeed our normal procedure. It's an extraordinary meeting that we've just gone through, by special request.

Thank you all. The meeting stands adjourned until the next one, at the call of the Chair.

[The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.]

