

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

[9:09 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, it's almost 10 after 9, and I know we've got other places to be, most of us at 10 o'clock. We have more than enough for a quorum. Mr. McInnis is arriving.

You have a copy of the agenda before you, I trust. Motion to approve the agenda? Thank you, Red Deer-North. All those in favour of the approval of the agenda, please signify. Carried. Thank you.

Item 3, approval of February 1, 1990, minutes. Is there a motion to so dispose? Thank you, Calgary-Foothills. Adoption of the minutes of February 1: all those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Item 4(a). The report I have to give to members at this time is the fact that we have not had any communication from the CRTC as of this date. I attempted two days ago to phone Ms Barrett just to let her know that we had nothing to meet about as a subcommittee until the receipt of that letter, and that information was also given to Mr. Day and Mr. Wickman as members of the subcommittee. So the subcommittee still stands until such time as we hear further on that issue.

The Chair has just received a note that one other member will be about 15 minutes late.

Item 4(b), Report on Receipt of Tenders re Coverage of Question Period. The deadline for the tenders to be received was this past Monday afternoon at 2 o'clock. We only received one tender; that was from Videotron. We, however, received two other letters. One was from ITV, saying:

Thank you for inviting [us] to tender . . . Unfortunately, due to production and broadcast commitments already in place for 1990, we are unable to take advantage of this opportunity and must decline your offer to tender.

If you want that for your file, you can distribute those.

From Shaw:

In response to the call for tenders . . . [we] advise your office we would require an extension of the February 12th . . . deadline.

We require this extension to research the feasibility of submitting a proposal. Our response will be forwarded to your attention by February 23rd . . . should the extension be granted.

We have these for distribution as well. David, perhaps you could give that one around. We were also informed verbally by ACCESS that they would not be making a submission.

Before I can share with you what the Videotron bid is, I think as a committee you need to decide whether you are interested in extending the tendering period to February 23, bearing in mind that February 23 gets us precious close to the opening. If we were to accept a bid from them, if they do indeed bid – they have been here looking at the technical equipment changes that would have to be made. Robert will fill you in on the rest of that in a moment. Then we would have to see whether they could get that stuff in place before March 8.

Robert, if you could just fill in the rest of the technical stuff with regard to their position.

MR. R. DAY: Mr. Chairman, they had a technician in who toured both the Chamber and the control room above it. The majority of Videotron's equipment up there is anywhere from 10 to 12 years old and is not compliant with the same engineering specifications that Shaw uses, which would require complete reworking of the control room, new cables pulled down into the House into the two stationary camera areas because they use different camera equipment as well. That process in itself, once equipment is required, is anticipated to take at least 14 to 15

working days. So working backwards from March 8 gets you right back to February 23 as your absolute deadline.

DR. ELLIOTT: Is this tender call for 12 months, this term, this spring session, or what is it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The committee agreed that the length of time would be a three-year period.

DR. ELLIOTT: Three years.

DR. McNEIL: With an annual review.

MS BARRETT: Okay. Videotron is all set up to do this. They've been doing it, right? So if we waited and liked the Shaw proposal better and it didn't come in on time, is there a way we could ask Videotron to do it for a few days?

MR. R. DAY: Mr. Chairman, to Pam, the other difficulty Shaw has is that this is not their broadcast area.

MS BARRETT: That's true. That's right. Yeah.

MR. R. DAY: I don't know whether we get an exemption because of the nature of this building, or whether we do fall under the rules and regulations of the way CRTC has divided this city, but we are in Videotron's broadcast area, which causes Shaw another problem: permission for Videotron to move the signal from this building to their distribution system and then, in turn, back to Videotron's – all of which they thought was accomplishable, but again I think it's a complicating factor that they're going to have to examine in their bid.

MR. S. DAY: Mr. Chairman, is there a possibility that Shaw could faze the CRTC ruling because of what Mr. Day has just addressed, after being established here?

MR. R. DAY: Apparently, Mr. Day, they do work in co-operation in numerous areas and didn't anticipate it would be a problem. It is not a requirement to go to CRTC for a ruling. They do a lot of this type of sharing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Whichever way we slice it, if the coverage is given, we'd be going up to channel 19.

Cypress-Redcliff, Calgary-Foothills.

MR. HYLAND: That was my question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you.

MRS. BLACK: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I think the issue here really is: are we prepared to extend the date for acceptance of tenders? We have put a time frame out there, and I think we have to pretty well stick by it unless we extend the tendering to other groups as well. I don't think that was the intent of the committee. So I think that if the tender date has passed and we have only had one submission, then we fairly well have to stick to that submission.

MR. McINNIS: I'm not sure they have a serious problem about doing the production here. The licensing problem is over broadcast not over production. They produce things outside of their geographic area all the time, travel to film or whatever. I

don't anticipate that's a big problem. Is there a good reason why we can't look at the Videotron proposal before we decide whether to extend the deadline?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think the reason simply is that then we can't guarantee that the tender is airtight, and then if anybody else, like Shaw for example, hears what this tendering is, then they can . . .

Parliamentary Counsel, then Taber-Warner.

MR. M. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, if the Videotron tender was discussed, it would have to be in camera because of the risk of it being revealed, of course.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, it seems to me there's another approach. I may be the only person here who feels this way, but if the committee were to decide that we're not going to provide payment to anyone, the opportunity is there, as it is for the print media and other forms of electronic media. On principle I'm still opposed to adding a payment to any company to provide a service when they are already charging their subscribers a monthly fee. We're advised that this is popular. I believe it is, and I would hope it would continue to be provided. Why are we paying again? So what I'm saying is that if we make a decision that we don't wish to pay any firm any amount and notify all interested parties that if they wish to provide service, we will do our utmost to co-operate with them, hopefully there will be coverage.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, we're back to the issue, and we focus in on this now, and perhaps I can get a motion. Edmonton-Jasper Place. It's the matter of will we extend the tender period or will we not?

MR. McINNIS: Well, the difficulty with Bob's argument is that that's sort of the way the system was here before cable TV came in the first place, and it has the unhappy property, from the point of view of the people who sit on the opposition side of the House, that there are no sound jacks for regular television on the other side. It goes back to the days when you only got to see the right ear of people on the opposition side of the House, including government members, and that's it. You don't have broadcasting from both sides of the House. Also, you wouldn't be able to see the entire question period. I think you'd be back to the situation where the news media would be in there, the regular news media for their daily clips, and they would just get the one view of the House, and that's it.

What we're talking about is a service so that people can see all of question period from beginning to end. I think Alberta's unique in that we've had a cable operator who's been able to do it through the channel 10 operation and charge the costs against their community programming commitment. That's the difference between this and every other province, where in fact the production portion is paid from the Assembly funds. So we've been unique in that respect, and now what's happened is CRTC has said they're no longer going to allow it to be charged in that way. So what you're talking about would be, in essence, taking the service away from the public, and I have a problem with that.

MR. BOGLE: Well, just to quickly comment. First of all, not every other province provides a service. We didn't receive a sheet listing the number of jurisdictions, but that is not all other

nine provinces plus the federal government.

MR. McINNIS: I'm sorry. I meant to say every other province who provides some service.

MR. BOGLE: Some provinces provide; some do not.

Secondly, programs have to be purchased to fill space, and if all things were equal, we'd be entertaining bids by the two cable companies offering a certain sum of money to have this service, not putting bids in requesting that we provide dollars so they provide the service. I'm saying that if the demand is there – and I believe it is, and others have commented in the past that they believe it is there – then our responsibility should be to do everything we can to make the physical arrangements so that they can provide the coverage, and that's where our commitment should end.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just one quick point. If there were no television coverage of the House via Videotron or some other, similar networking, then I as Speaker would allow one of the networks to come over to the right of my Chair, which is one of the present Videotron locations. They'd have to do it on a random, week-by-week basis or something like that. So I would still allow that there would be some shots; there'd be shots of the opposition or members on that side of the House, if the other thing were to come to pass.

However, we're talking about the extension on the bid tender at the moment. Cypress-Redcliff, Red Deer-North, and then let's have a motion, please.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I would move that we do not extend the bid period because the risks at the bottom end are too great. If the equipment doesn't show or something, we're out of time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a motion not to extend the bid.

MR. S. DAY: Just a technical question, through you, Mr. Chairman, if I could, to Mr. Kowalski. Is there a procedural problem, or do companies get upset, in your experience, who have filed on time and then it's extended because another company has asked?

MR. KOWALSKI: Absolutely. Certainly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Additional comments about extending the bid process. Is there a call for the question?

MR. McINNIS: I'm curious. What is the downside of that? Are we worried that Videotron is going to pull out? Is that the feeling? Is that the downside?

MR. HYLAND: I would think the downside would be if Shaw can't get equipment on time, or I would think that if they're going to put other cable in there – I don't know how big the conduits are – as they pull Videotron's out, they'd be putting their own in. Once you start, you wouldn't be able to reverse it if you don't make opening day.

MR. KOWALSKI: John, I think there are two steps in here. Number one is that if there is a tender that had been put out with a time frame on it, that becomes a public document that everybody knows they work towards. I think any extension of

any tender procedure without some pretty legitimate reasons is very questionable in terms of the ethical side of tendering. Now, I think we have to support this motion.

The next decision, then, is whether or not we choose to accept Videotron. Under the rules we've had, I think there's a statement in there that no bid is necessarily accepted. If we choose not to do that, then we just go and do the whole process again. But that's reopening the whole thing: fairness to everyone, not just extending it because we only have one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We have a motion before us not to extend the bid process. Those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

All right, I'll distribute the bid from Videotron. Clerk, you received this. Do you want to go quickly through it and highlight it so we can get to the pungent parts?

DR. McNEIL: The Videotron bid came in before the deadline. They indicate they'd allocate the proceedings to channel 19 and feed at no charge to Shaw. They indicated their viewership within the Videotron system of 594,000, and they would continue to provide the tape to ACCESS Network for rebroadcast at 11 p.m., which would reach 500,000 homes in Alberta. They also will provide at no charge a "clean" untitled video feed . . . to the 4 local area broadcasters . . .

Shot Restrictions/Captions/Music and Titles

Videotron Communications proposes to provide the Speaker of the Legislature with a written policy upon positive acceptance of our proposal as to the method and coverage of the proceedings.

This document would form the policy for operating.

It seems to me that would be something that would have to be approved by the Speaker. Really, the Speaker sets the policy for the shot restrictions and so on rather than Videotron.

In terms of the bottom-line cost: \$2,054.40 a week or \$410.88 a day. Depending on the number of sitting days in the year, we're talking between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year. Right now the only costs we're paying are for ACCESS satellite charges, about \$7,000 a year, so our costs for coverage would go up from \$7,000 to around \$40,000 to \$45,000 a year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But included in that were the figures as to how much does it cost us with regard to ACCESS, those figures that we worked on.

MR. R. DAY: Mr. Chairman, \$84.25 per day for ACCESS and \$410.88 per day for Videotron, for a total of \$495.13 per day when you put the two of them together.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the total is roughly \$500 a day.

MR. R. DAY: Broadcast day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The other point is on the top of page 3 of that submission: the upgrading of the equipment over the next eight months up behind – what? – the press gallery.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, I move we accept the Videotron proposal, and I'd like to speak to it, if I may.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. McINNIS: This is the only way that we're going to get live broadcast of the Assembly proceedings in the province of Alberta. I'm sure there are members at the table who don't

want to accept the \$40,000 bill for production costs, given the history of this thing, but the material that was distributed from Robert Day at the last meeting illustrates what other jurisdictions pay for this type of coverage for production costs: \$3.2 million a year in Ontario, \$350,000 in Saskatchewan, \$2 million in Quebec, \$1.5 million operating costs in Ottawa; there are some additional costs as well. We were also given information that it would cost in operational costs \$100,000-plus for us to try to operate this internally. So in comparison to what other jurisdictions pay for this type of service, \$40,000 is a bargain, I think, by any stretch.

The alternative, which is to reject the proposal, is that we don't have the service. Now, I think that means in effect, you know, taking away a right that Albertans have come to expect over a period of time. It's clearly not the fault of the subscriber that the money for this service was in fact taken from the community programming budget rather than some other source. There is a demand for it, but whether there's a demand to the extent that the cable companies – and I don't think this would actually happen. The only way that they could do it without costs would be to petition the CRTC to increase their subscriber fee on the basis that they're providing this additional service. Now, that's certainly not going to happen in time for this session of the Legislature, and I don't know if it would happen at all, to tell you the truth. Unfortunately, we're being put in the same position as other provinces which provide the service.

Now, the argument can be made that, well, there's no reason for us to provide the service, but I think there is. I think the reason is quite clear: that in a democratic society people should have access to this type of coverage. Before 1971 there was no broadcast of debates at all. There's been a trend over the last 20 years to provide access through the public media, and we would certainly be moving against the trend were we to shut it down now on account of the change in accounting principles from the CRTC.

So I think we should approve the Videotron proposal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The Chair would like to point out today that we're going to follow strict procedure here because of our mutually-agreed time constraints upon ourselves. So the mover of that motion will have a chance to sum up at the end. If we all speak once, I'm sure you can make your points.

Thank you. I have Edmonton-Whitemud, Cypress-Redcliff, Taber-Warner, Red Deer-North.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, John has said it very clearly, and I support what he's saying. I support the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, a question and a comment. If – and that's maybe a big if – we're successful at appealing the decision to CRTC, where does that leave us? Are we then still tied into this amount, or would Videotron change back to the channel they were on originally and assume the costs that they've outlined for us here?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good question.

MS BARRETT: I just suggest that I think they would be forced to, given the presentation that is transcribed, in fact, from Brad from a few weeks ago. His presentation made it pretty clear that they preferred to stay on community programming and that

they preferred to put the cost on that portion of their budget and their commitment to the CRTC. I think they would.

MR. HYLAND: Because it just seems to me that an agency so far removed ruling on something has missed the whole point here. If we're successful in trying to show them that, I just wondered where we would stand, you know. That could be right, that he made pretty plain their desire to really work.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That might be seen as some kind of a caveat in response.

Okay. Taber-Warner, Red Deer-North. Did I see Edmonton-Highlands?

MS BARRETT: Might as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. BOGLE: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. John, twice in your opening comments you mentioned that if we didn't enter into this contract, the service would not be provided. I wanted to know on what basis you made those comments.

MR. McINNIS: On the basis that we have only one bid to provide the service.

MR. BOGLE: Well, if you recall, a question was asked of Brad when he was here, and then I believe it was the chairman who suggested it was an unfair question. That was: would you provide the service if you didn't receive payment from the Assembly? Then you paused. Now, all I'm saying is that given the popularity of question period and the small amount of dollars involved, \$40,000, why are you assuming that if we don't pay the \$40,000 they'll automatically drop the coverage? I suggest that they may turn to Shaw and ACCESS and others and say, "We've got to do this together, and we'll cover it out of our subscriptions." Just as they cover programs and other feed they buy and put on the air, they'll deal with question period the way they deal with everyone else.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, will you hold that for your summation, please?

Red Deer-North, followed by the Clerk.

MR. S. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to verify. I didn't catch the remarks of Mr. Day in terms of - what was the \$500 a day? Is that what it's costing us now? Could I just get clarification of that?

MR. R. DAY: Mr. Chairman, those charges are the \$84.25 per day we have always paid to ACCESS for their distribution, and that's always been budgeted for. The new figure is the Videotron proposal which you have reviewed . . .

MR. S. DAY: Right.

MR. R. DAY: . . . of approximately \$420. That's what drives it up to \$495 per day.

MR. S. DAY: All right. Just a suggestion, or I guess a question, Mr. Chairman, if anybody could elaborate on it. I'm not suggesting this facetiously, I'm very serious. We've got a popular show here. We've got \$500 a day. During hockey

games and football games the referee always judiciously pauses at certain times and a commercial is run. I would like to suggest that a show this popular . . . For \$500 I think people would line up to get an ad halfway through question period, at which time the Speaker of the House could be giving an announcement about proceedings later on in the day or whatever. I'd like to toss that out as a revenue consideration: either allowing the company to do that or a director of the Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Put a towel over the edge of the penalty box.

Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: In terms of the issue of what happens if the CRTC reverses itself, if we proceeded with Videotron, we could write into the contract what the outcome would be in that instance, so that would be part of the agreement.

MR. S. DAY: But what about the commercial possibilities?

MS BARRETT: That's not formally part of the motion, Stock.

MR. S. DAY: No, but it would help me in that decision.

DR. McNEIL: One can't advertise on community channels.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Then agreed, Parliamentary Counsel, if this were to proceed, we could indeed do the caveat back to them vis-à-vis the CRTC?

MR. M. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, I believe we could do that without the problem that we hadn't included it as a condition of the tender, the reason being, of course, that Videotron were the only company who were in that position before and already had a slot for it in their community programming. It's certainly something which we might have included in the original tender document if we had thought of the matter before. But because they're the only ones who are in this position . . .

MRS. BLACK: Would that not change the basis of their bid?

MR. M. CLEGG: I think in light of the presentation they made to this committee, as Ms Barrett has said, they left us with the clear implication that they would provide it free if they were able to continue it on channel 10. I think we can take the position that we have relied on that representation, not subsequent dealings. We couldn't expect anybody else to make the same representation, so there was no point in putting it in the tender documents.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Do any other members wish to speak to this? The Member for Barrhead.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I don't seem to have - in the package anyway - a copy of the document that went out inviting submissions, but as I recall, basically it was pretty wide open in the sense that the people could be as innovative as they wanted to in terms of the presentation. So I think it would be ethical, then, from our point of view, at least from my point of view, to raise a few questions with respect to the document they provided. This is not a take it as you leave package, as I understand, in terms of the way the submission went out.

I've got a couple of questions. There's one I want to raise here – and I'm not sure if we can get clarification or not – to give some consideration or thought to. In the first paragraph: "Proposal to televise the daily proceedings of Oral Question Period." Is it very clear that it's only the Oral Question Period they're talking about? Would they have the throne speech and the budget speech, as an example, as part of this package? Are we in a position to deal with them on that one? I'm not so sure. I know we did have a discussion about channel 19 and what its impact is, and those who do have cable – ACCESS is not in everyone's home in this province. I'm not sure the availability is to everyone's home in this province. So we are leaving some people out, and I'm not sure if it's an important factor to consider at this point in time or not.

On page 2 under "Copyright," I'm not sure I understand that statement:

Videotron Communications agrees to warrant to the Assembly sole right to the proceedings, but offers no right to the Assembly for videotapes or cassettes that might contain a video copy of the proceedings.

I'm not sure I understand that. Does that mean we can't get copies of it?

MR. McINNIS: It means we have to pay for them.

MR. R. DAY: You have to pay for copies from them.

MR. KOWALSKI: Okay. That's a point, then, for further clarification and discussion with respect to it.

Three paragraphs after that, "Shot Restrictions/Captions/Music and Titles." I get the impression from that, in essence, if we were to agree to this, then they would provide to the Speaker a written policy. And that has to be subject to the approval of the Speaker; we can't have a company then dictating what they would use in the Assembly. That has to be approved, and there has to be a subject to approval item in there. If we are in a position to have these items clarified under the process we've got, Mr. Chairman, I think they must be clarified, and if we are in a position to discuss, "negotiate", fair game. If we're not, well, then we have to know that, I guess, before we have our final vote.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On the matter of copyright, it is an issue that is of concern, because after all it is our signal. Just because they have their cameras on the floor of our Assembly doesn't make it their signal in terms of copyright. I know what has been happening is that they have allowed us in the library to make a copy daily of question period, but it means we don't have the copyright per se. So on that point, Parliamentary Counsel?

MR. M. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, the copyright is in the production, which is ours. I think what they're saying here – and I do agree that the matter has to be clarified – is that they are not trying to make any claim of copyright on the signal. And I should hope they wouldn't, because it is our copyright. What they're saying is that that price doesn't include the provision of videotapes to us, and nor is there an implication that they become our tapes, but because it's our production, they can't transfer any copyright to themselves nor could they grant any copyright to anybody else.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The other point that was brought up, this matter of control of the shots that are there. Again, by Standing Orders, it's within the jurisdiction of the Speaker; it's not theirs

to tell us.

Thank you. All right.

Barrhead.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I will govern myself according to your first dictate: that you only speak once.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, you were responding about these two points. I just wanted to make certain that you . . .

MR. KOWALSKI: Okay. On the provision of tapes, it seems to me that one of the things they should be doing is providing each caucus with a copy of the tape. Instead of us having to get somebody sitting down there with a VCR and everything else and making a copy of it, they must have the equipment to make three additional copies, and daily, at the end of the day, each caucus gets a copy of the tape. This is hot stuff. I'm sure MLAs want to see how good they've been and to assess their own performance, how the question was raised, and everything else. You've got one. It's not a big deal, but it's part of the service.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Is there any legal problem with setting out a contract that indicates the wishes of this committee that would vary somewhat this proposal? Actually, my question is to Mike or to David, I guess. Is there any problem, contractually or legally, with setting out a few of the specific requirements that we would want to put into an agreement, such as specifically identifying our copyright, asking for at least one or maybe three tapes, that sort of thing?

DR. McNEIL: My view would be no. We would say we want to proceed with drawing up a contract with you, and we'll have to agree upon the terms before we proceed. I don't think that's a problem.

MR. HYLAND: And that cost would be minimal to them, at the rate they'd buy tapes at.

MS BARRETT: In that case, I think what we should do is just identify the specifics we want: for instance, inclusion of throne speeches, budget speeches, and for them to make a copy of the daily proceedings; spell it out right here in this committee – or if everybody agrees, just jump up and say yes – and then proceed with that.

It seems to me one thing we aren't talking about that looks good is their desire to upgrade their equipment. I assume what that means is investing in better quality cameras, and that couldn't hurt either.

I support the motion, but also I think that if we've got any concerns, let's spell them out and ask David or the Speaker or whoever it is who does this to just proceed on that basis and get the negotiations concluded.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. They did install new cameras. The two on the floor are state of the art.

MS BARRETT: Oh, right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But this would be equipment up in the switching room, just for clarification.

MS BARRETT: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud, on a point of clarification.

MR. WICKMAN: I just want to make an amendment, if I could, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have an amendment to the motion?

MR. WICKMAN: The amendment would be: subject to entering into an agreement to the satisfaction of the Speaker. That way, Mr. Chairman, you can take those concerns that have been expressed here into the negotiating process and, you know, hopefully arrive at a suitable contract or agreement, because time is running out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We now have an amendment. Everyone may speak to the amendment if they so desire.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question on the amendment. [interjection]

MS BARRETT: The amendment is: subject to the Speaker's negotiations, basically; authorize the Speaker to do the negotiations according to our will.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's with regard to things like copyright and the shot control and so forth.

MS BARRETT: Yes. Budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. All those in favour of the amendment, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

On the main motion.

MS BARRETT: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Jasper Place, summation?

MR. McINNIS: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On the main motion: the approval to proceed. Those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Do you want the votes recorded on this one or not? The motion carries.

Within your file there is a copy of the tender document. It was attached to the minutes of the last meeting. With regard to the throne speech and the issue of the Budget Address, Videotron has done that by courtesy to date. The additional cameras you sometimes see at throne speech or budget are brought in and paid for by an office other than ours. My understanding is that Videotron would at least cover the opening of the House, but more and more it's been developing that the only coverage is done via Videotron. Okay? Thank you.

The next item on the agenda is the matter that was brought to the last meeting of the committee with regard to space allocation and the possibility of doing some arrangements with regard to an opposition members' lounge and government members' lounge for the duration of this upcoming session of

the Legislature. Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, I'll move that the Confederation Room be designated as the government members' meeting room and that the offices on the west side of the Chamber be designated as the opposition members' meeting room for the duration of the sittings of the spring session; that sometime after that this committee reassess those arrangements to see whether or not we're satisfied with them, and make a final decision at that time; that the existing members' lounge continue to be an area where caucus members from all three parties could meet; and that the coffee and juice continue to be available in the existing members' lounge.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Discussion? Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: I want to speak against the motion. I think it's a very bad move. I think this process will be extremely destructive, for a couple of reasons.

First of all, the members' lounge will not be used very much by caucuses. One can anticipate that already. Given an opportunity to caucus all the time, that is what political people will do. They will hang around only with their own types or their own species. I don't think that's a very constructive thing to do, quite frankly. You will see that when it's necessary, groups from any given caucus will have meetings. They just go into a corner, and everybody recognizes the importance of staying away from that group of people while they have a private discussion. The system has worked extremely well. Further segregation of caucuses, I think, will lead to greater ill will, and that will be particularly true towards the end of sittings as opposed to the beginning of sittings.

Moreover, I speak strongly against the motion insofar as it disrupts having a media room to which all members of the Assembly have access in a fair amount of comfort. It will force television cameras to hang about outside on the marble floors, in a noisy environment that is slippery. It sounds lousy, and it makes for a real mess. In other words, what we will cause if we approve this motion is a zoo or a circus just outside the main doors of the Assembly. I think that would be just a complete disaster.

I don't see the need for this in the first instance, but in the second instance I see it as being extremely disruptive, negative and, in the long run, causing further grief for everybody.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I concur with the comments made by Ms Barrett. I could anticipate further problems developing: great scrambling in the front, media in awkward positions. Here, at least, they are confined to a degree in the situation as we have it in our lounge. I haven't had that much of a problem with it, and I don't think it's been that much of a problem for anyone. I think the situation is good. Maybe if there were ways of improving it without creating further damage, fine, but I don't see this as a solution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. S. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I think this goes beyond what the Member for Edmonton-highlands is suggesting in terms of wanting to concoct some kind of Huxleian social science experiment by keeping us all in a hothouse environment and somehow we're all going to blend into one monolithic thought

pattern.

We do have a very real difficulty as was experienced last session, and we worked together and it was mitigated somewhat. But that difficulty comes with assistants of members or ministers who need to get together, discuss, go over some points in a short period of time, and that becomes very difficult – actually nigh impossible – in terms of using the existing area that we do have. There has been considerable expense gone to to provide and equip what I think is one of the best media rooms available that I've seen in an Assembly, which is readily accessible to all of us. My experience has been that the media's been very co-operative in terms of sending their little orange slips in to members when they want to talk to somebody, and we've got a room designed exactly for that purpose here in the building at taxpayers' expense, acoustically set up and everything else – absolutely perfect for that – which would make for no confusion anywhere, either in this room or out in the hallway. I would suggest that we look seriously at using existing top-quality facilities and make the changes necessary. I'm assured there are going to be no renovation costs, so there's no dollar expense to the taxpayer by having these rooms designated for each party.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Grande Prairie.

DR. ELLIOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to speak strongly in favour of this motion. I have experienced personal problems with respect to meeting with researchers, secretaries, et cetera, in the lounge space at the back there that we now have in existence. I still think that's prime area back there for meeting all members of the Legislature. I can't agree with some of the fears that were expressed by Edmonton-Highlands about us not having an opportunity to split a Coke back there, but I have experienced that inability to meet properly with people who I consider top support staff.

I understood from the last meeting, Mr. Chairman, that you said that when the House is sitting the fountain could be turned off, because that's one of the sources of noise. If there are other sources of noise that are irritating out there and it takes some carpeting or something, we might consider that, but then of course we're talking about expense. I see the media working very vigorously outside these areas when they want to, and it seems to work well for them; they get their stories.

I look forward to this change with real enthusiasm, Mr. Chairman, and I support it.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, the Member for Red Deer-North has consistently voted against anything that might contribute to the comfort and safety of members of any party other than his own.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me for half a moment. Red Deer-North, some comments are being directed your way. Perhaps . . .

MR. BOGLE: See, there is a need for meeting rooms.

MS BARRETT: It's right down there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Is an adjournment necessary at this time?

I was saying the Member for Red Deer-North has consistently voted against anything that might contribute to the comfort and

safety of members from parties other than his own on the grounds of restraint. Now he tries to tell us that moving the working offices of the Clerk Assistant and records clerk up one floor, the Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chairman moved up one floor, Parliamentary Counsel and Sergeant-at-Arms moved up one floor, and another room changed around for pages and security staff doesn't cost any money. I suggest that somewhere along the line we have to get straight the fact that when money is spent for whatever purpose it's an expenditure, and restraint that's going to apply should be applied evenhandedly.

I think government members have to realize that this is going to be interpreted as restricting access to the news media. You can say that people can go and present themselves downstairs in the TV room, and if they do, they do, but if they don't, then they don't get interviewed. I think probably you should realize that this is going to be interpreted in that way, and that's one reason I'm opposed to it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Point of clarification.

MR. S. DAY: Just on the clarification, it's my understanding – and I could be wrong – that as I view the proceedings of the House of Commons, the hallways there seem to be very effective places for the media to interact with various MPs should they not want to go to a designated room. The fact that they don't have their own carpeted, paneled secondary room to visit people certainly hasn't seemed to restrict access at all. The hallways seem to be quite adequate for that purpose.

MR. McINNIS: On who's account?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Additional comments?

MR. BOGLE: To conclude debate?

MR. McINNIS: Well, if we're going to have House of Commons style scrums here, I think that's something we should be concerned about for the health and safety of members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Taber-Warner, concluding debate.

MR. BOGLE: Well, there are a couple of points I wanted to re-emphasize. First of all, the question of how to deal with the media was dealt with when this matter was first introduced by the Speaker. We do have a media room. Arrangements can be made. There is still the opportunity for interviews in the hall. I think we have to go back to the basic purpose of this room. It was not designated as a media room. We have a media room in the building. We're talking about members. The most important point I want to emphasize is that the motion as proposed would have a life that coincides with the spring sitting, so we're talking about approximately a three-month period of time. Then this committee will come back and reassess it to determine whether or not the arrangements are satisfactory for all concerned, not just the opposition and government members but others who interact with us in the building, including the media. On that basis I think it's appropriate and urge members to support it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? Thank you. Motion carries.

MR. McINNIS: I'd like to request a recorded vote on that,

please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Request for a recorded vote duly noted.

[For the motion: Mrs. Black, Mr. Bogle, Dr. Elliott, Mr. Hyland, Mrs. Mirosh]

[Against the motion: Ms Barrett, Mr. McInnis, Mr. Wickman]

MR. McINNIS: A question, too, about the opposition lounge on the west side of the Chamber. Is that to be one lounge for both opposition parties or two opposition lounges?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, if you wish, there are three spaces there if you want to look at it that way. One is the Clerk's office. The large area could perhaps be for one group and the vault could be used for another group.

MR. McINNIS: The vault.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I leave that up to the opposition parties to determine. The hallway will still stay there.

For information of the committee, I have had at least two meetings with the chairman of the press gallery in case the motion were to pass or not pass, so we at least had some foreknowledge and discussion with them.

There are a number of points I want to make. Number one, when we did the renovations of the Chamber, we moved the print media from up behind the press gallery down onto floor number one. We have given the print media and the electronic media some of the best office locations and office amenities in the whole country. Also with that renovation, we supplied them with direct audio feed, which has helped considerably for the radio networks in particular, because then they're getting the direct, clean feed down to them and they can take that off downstairs because oftentimes they don't want to come upstairs to watch what's going on there. In line with this, we have made provision during the winter here to run video feeds directly from the video control room, a clean feed without fonting, all the way down again to the media offices on floor number one. So they will have the line feed directly to there, and if they want to purchase monitors and VCRs to get clean signals, they can do that provided we indeed have a signal to give them. So we've tried to meet some of their concerns there.

The matter of the fountain has been brought up. We have taken steps to have the fountain shut off after question period for a period of time, because that was another issue raised by Mr. Wanagas on behalf of all the media involved. So that should help in terms of the electronic media there, as well as the general noise.

One of the concerns they had was if the lobbies were to be developed, how do the print media and electronic media, the television cameras in the House, get to members of all parties after question period. The television cameras will continue to go from down that corridor on the west side, and they will be allowed to come out even before the end of question period, as they have been doing to some degree. So that should still allow them to get out to speak to members they want to get hold of. I will now relax a policy which we had since the renovations, which was that the press could not travel back and forth through the public gallery, so when they want to get out after question period to catch members, I will now allow them to exit via that gallery so they can get down faster. In addition to that, they will

also have the ability to egress or exit via the renovated fifth-floor hallway. That renovation should be completed within about another week, where we're going to have the tour guides bring the school groups to see the VCRs on the Assembly and so forth. That would still allow the media to go to the fifth floor over and down that way or vice versa. They will now be able to go, at the end of question period only, through the public gallery. In addition to that, we will unlock the key mechanism on the library so they can access both directions with regard to the library. So they are not being blocked and cut off from getting out to be able to catch their favourite member of the opposition or of government, because I know full well that it has the possibility of rather blocking things from the lights from there to there. In that regard, in the discussions with them I would allow that certain amount of traffic happening through the public gallery.

The matter of the overflow and availability for interviews. Indeed, yes, it'll probably take place at the top of the staircases. But I've also agreed through yourselves, and also will do it via memos, that hopefully some members will go down around the fountain to perhaps have the interview take place, as well as the greater use of the media facility that is there on the ground floor. Later today I will then have more discussions with the media about other issues they may wish to bring up vis-à-vis this. As the committee has done in its wisdom, it's passed it for the purpose of this three- to four-month period. I'm sure we're going to have adjustments all the way through and at the end of it a reassessment.

Thank you.

DR. ELLIOTT: Mr. Chairman, should an entire caucus choose to invite a media member into their lounge, would that be an option that would be left with that caucus for an announcement or press release or briefing or whatever? That's my question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't know. I would think initially no, because what's happening here is that the caucuses are claiming two areas as belonging to the members and not to the media. But if we find we're running into insurmountable problems in your group, then at the call of the Chair we can come back and have another discussion about it as a committee.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, that was never part of the motion. The motion was to create opposition lounges, and it was never presented this was specifically to exclude news media. Presumably if we have a lounge, we could use it for whatever purpose we want. If we can't, then we need a different motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. But the one lounge where the media are not allowed is back there.

MR. McINNIS: I understand that.

MS BARRETT: That's clear. That's the rule.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's clearly sacrosanct, yeah, for the back.

MR. McINNIS: And there's no staff allowed there either.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's correct.

MR. McINNIS: But we're talking about the newly created caucus lounge.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That section over there. If you choose to do that, fine. As I say, we can adjust with all that.

MR. WICKMAN: Just one question, Mr. Chairman. When you made reference earlier to the two opposition parties determining how that lounge would be shared – and John has made his comments about the media – did you anticipate some renovation in there that would make it two areas, or what?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. I see it as common area for the opposition parties. The space isn't wide enough.

I'm sorry to push us on, ladies and gentlemen, but we do have one motion that should be entertained. Hopefully in the light of the decision about Videotron, someone here is prepared to make a motion that our budget be adjusted to a minimum price, I would think, of \$50,000. We've got an estimate here of \$40,000, but I don't . . . Forty thousand?

MS BARRETT: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Forty thousand dollars. That's with regard to the Videotron.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, actually I would move the allowance of a \$50,000 budget for this item in the event that it becomes a long sitting or in the event of a fall sitting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member.

MR. BOGLE: Just a question for clarification. Is that on the daily rate or weekly rate?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's on the \$500 a day.

MR. BOGLE: I hope it's on a daily rate, looking at . . .

MS BARRETT: Oh, I see what you're getting at. Oh, sure. Yeah. I mean, what we're talking about is just allocating money through our budget.

MR. BOGLE: Yes. But the letter, as I recall, had two different options, a weekly rate and a daily rate, and considering statutory holidays and any breaks we choose to take, i.e. Easter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Interpret it as the daily rate, and this would be to cover the cost of Videotron and ACCESS.

MR. R. DAY: We budgeted the ACCESS.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We budgeted the ACCESS? I'm sorry. It's Videotron. Thank you.

All those in favour? Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

Members are aware perhaps that we have a brief coffee break over in my office after this meeting. I mean we have a coffee meeting in my office.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, can't we just stay here?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can probably arrange that.

MR. BOGLE: All right, because I've got to go. I've got a meeting in Donnelly.

MS BARRETT: Oh, that's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. A call of any other meetings, a call of the Chair?

MS BARRETT: Call of the Chair.

MR. McINNIS: So March 8 is basically off, is it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does the committee want to meet March 8? Not unless we have any crisis develop.

MS BARRETT: We get more meetings than we need.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At the call of the Chair.

MS BARRETT: Call of the Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion to adjourn . . .

MS BARRETT: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: . . . from Edmonton-Highlands.

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you want these back?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, members can keep the Videotron proposal.

Thank you very much. Those voting in favour, please stretch. Thank you. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:11 a.m.]

