

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

9:05 a.m.

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, ladies and gentlemen, I have about 7 minutes past 9. We certainly have a quorum, so the meeting's called to order.

You have your minute books there with you, the draft agenda is there, and as we know, a good chunk of our next number of half days and full days together is with regard to the budget estimates.

First, with regard to the agenda, are there any errors or omissions, any additions you want to make?

MR. BOGLE: Really a suggestion, Mr. Chairman. When we get into New Business, could we deal with items (b) through (e) prior to (a), the 1992-93 budget estimates?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You would like to go through (b), (c), (d), and (e) prior to (a)?

MR. BOGLE: I was thinking that there are matters that need to be dealt with and we will be spending some time on the budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, and if not, then they can be tabled to be put later on the agenda.

I take that also as then being a motion for the approval of the agenda.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Item 3, June 27 committee meeting minutes. Motion to approve?

DR. ELLIOTT: I'll move the acceptance, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Grande Prairie, thank you.

All those in favour of the adoption of the minutes of June 27? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Business Arising from the Minutes. First is with regard to the subcommittee as chaired by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud: Communication/Constituency Allowances Guidelines.

Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, we have no further activity to report. About the only other item that may have come forward would have been the possibility of looking at constituency budget guidelines, but that of course has been addressed in the budget by the city clerk, so there is no further information to report.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hopefully the city clerk was not involved.

MR. WICKMAN: Provincial Clerk.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Okay; that seems to be the report on 4(a).

Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think it's apparent that the subcommittee is not going to come back with a unanimous recommendation on what should be done regarding communica-

tion/constituency allowance guidelines. We've wrestled with that problem for some time. We've looked at various publications or inserts that members have made. We've looked at suggestions that all proposed inserts or publications be reviewed with the Speaker's office before they're sent out. I think some members may in fact be doing that now. But I think it's time we bring this issue to a conclusion. This does not come as a recommendation of the subcommittee or through the subcommittee, but if it's appropriate, I would like to put forward a motion to deal with the matter so that it can be thoroughly debated in the full Members' Services Committee and dealt with.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The committee can do what it wishes.

MR. BOGLE: Okay. If we can have it circulated, please.

This is a proposal which I put to the subcommittee some months ago. I have two proposed amendments to our existing orders on communication and promotion, the first under section 3. Section 3 is amended (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "expenses . . ." Just a second, Mr. Chairman.

MRS. BLACK: You guys are late.

MS BARRETT: We had a conflict, a caucus meeting at the same time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're on item 4(a) of the agenda, members. There's a motion that's being circulated, and that's where we are just at the moment.

Do you have a copy for Mr. Wickman, as chairman?

MR. BOGLE: This relates back, John, to the subcommittee that you've worked on, which Percy is chairing, communication/constituency allowance guidelines. You recall that we do not have a recommendation coming back through the subcommittee.

MR. McINNIS: The subcommittee hasn't met.

MR. BOGLE: Well, we have met. We've met a number of times, but we can't seem to come to a conclusion. You did suggest at one of the meetings that some members, in fact all members, might consider showing their proposed communication material to the Speaker's office before sending it out if they have questions as to whether or not it met the current guidelines. In section 3(1) the current wording, which is giving concern to some members because of the way it is worded, is:

expenses related generally to communication between the Member and his constituents and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing to pay for . . .

In other words, we would substitute that section with this proposed new section:

which relate to non-partisan communication between the Member and his constituents, including payment for . . .

Then down in subsection (2), repealing all of subsection (2) and substituting:

An item may not be paid for under subsection (1) if it bears any political party logo, promotes political party activities, solicits political party funds or memberships, or contains personal criticism of another Member.

That's what's proposed in the motion in terms of strengthening the wording in our current guidelines.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Jasper Place. Hopefully, you'll have all your distilled wisdom together. Good morning. Let's go, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Okay. My concern is: who defines what nonpartisan is? Can we get a general definition of what that is first, before we proceed?

MR. BOGLE: In the discussions that we had in the committee, it was agreed by all members, I believe -- if Percy or John or Dianne feel I've strayed, please get into this discussion -- that the primary purpose of the public funds provided for communication by a member with his or her constituents is to ensure that there's that direct communication back. It is not and it should not be used as a vehicle to lambaste another party, another member. It is to communicate the member's views of what is happening, to solicit input from his or her constituents. So "nonpartisan" is defined in that sense, that you're staying away from party politics, another party in particular. You use the government funds provided for communication in that way.

MS BARRETT: Okay. But what I'm getting at is: if I have a report that says the government said this in response to such and such an event and I said that, is that defined as partisan? That's what I'm getting at. No?

DR. ELLIOTT: I wouldn't think so.

MS BARRETT: Okay. So what you're talking about is depersonalizing.

MR. BOGLE: Well, it's not depersonalizing it from the member to his or her constituents.

MS BARRETT: Right.

MR. BOGLE: But by not making reference to another political party by name, or another member.

MS BARRETT: Even by name?

MR. BOGLE: If it's an opposition member communicating, the opposition member can refer by government policy and our position . . .

MR. McINNIS: But not the Progressive Conservative government?

MR. BOGLE: How is the current definition used by the staff, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, it's David that has to administer it. Are you following some of those guidelines that you have from some of the other provinces as a comparative basis, Clerk?

DR. McNEIL: Well, it's very difficult to define a general rule for applying. We're looking at each one as they arise. If we identify a problem, we seek a legal opinion on it first. If we see something that we think may be a problem, we seek a legal opinion from counsel, and then based on that we make an evaluation.

MR. BOGLE: What the motion is attempting to do is to tighten up the existing guideline, which some members are inadvertently straying from and then finding that they're not able to be reimbursed for funds expended. A number of cases are in that category. John

did suggest at one of our meetings that we might consider referring everything to the Speaker's staff for review first. That was declined by the members of the committee.

9:15

MR. McINNIS: That's not my memory.

MR. BOGLE: You don't remember raising that point?

MR. McINNIS: I don't remember that conclusion to that item. In fact, I have a very different understanding of what happened at that meeting.

MR. BOGLE: Why don't you tell us what you understand?

MR. McINNIS: I will, but I'll wait my turn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Were the guidelines from other provinces not distributed to everybody on the committee? That's my understanding.

All right. Edmonton-Highlands, were there other comments you wanted to make?

MS BARRETT: Yeah. I guess the comment would be that I'm concerned that this is a lot more restrictive than practices that obtain in other provinces. I don't mind pursuing some sort of, you know, generalized limitation, but from what's just been discussed, I think the application of this motion, if passed as is, could still be very arbitrary and could still be more restrictive than the words might imply. I don't think we should proceed without a very precise and agreed-to definition of what nonpartisan communication means, especially considering this is the first we've seen of it. It wasn't even in our book.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There was a document prepared by Legislative Assembly November 21 and sent to all members, it's my understanding: Constituency Mailouts: A Survey of Guidelines of the House of Commons, Provincial, and Territorial Jurisdictions. Hopefully, you all have this.

All right. Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

MR. McINNIS: I guess my colleague and I should apologize for being late. We're in a position where we have a full caucus meeting at the same time as this meeting, which is very awkward.

The subcommittee that dealt with this matter met and discussed this item generally. We had a general discussion; there were no decisions made and no minutes kept to my knowledge. The committee also ended up dealing with another matter related to security in constituency offices.

I want to make it clear to this committee that this proposal was never even presented to that subcommittee, so this is the first time that I've seen it as a member of that subcommittee. So to say that we failed to come to an agreement I think is a bit of a stretch, because we didn't really have the opportunity to work on this.

I think this proposal does need work because crucial terms in it are not defined, in particular the term "nonpartisan." Essentially what the guidelines have always defined is the limitation on what can be done in a nonpartisan way. Of course you can't use constituency office funds for partisan purposes, and so the definitions and the restrictions that were put in the members' services order were always aimed at defining that. You don't solve the problem by throwing the word back in there without defining it.

I just heard the Member for Taber-Warner say that the mere mention of a political party name might offend this guideline. That's ridiculous because you can't communicate effectively about what

happens in this place without mentioning the fact that there are political parties in here, three of them at the present time. There may be more, there may be less at future times. The Liberals have always taken the position before this committee that they can't identify themselves to the public without using their party name because there's not one but two opposition parties, and they don't want all the opposition to be thought of as being the same entity. So they've defended their right to use their party name for that reason. Certainly if they have that right, then others do as well. I would not be at all surprised to find that members have used political party names in ways that most people would not consider to be nonpartisan, but the member obviously doesn't know whether that does or doesn't offend the rule. Nobody could, because if you just throw out the term "nonpartisan," it doesn't mean a great deal at all.

I do think that if we have a subcommittee assigned to look at a problem, it would be fair and reasonable, not to say protocol, to at least table the proposal before it comes to the committee here, because this is the first I've seen of it. My colleague mentioned that it wasn't in the binder; well, it wasn't even presented to the committee.

The second part of it is essentially the same as what we have now except that it's written in the negative as opposed to the positive. That's the definition that was arrived at with a great deal of staff work among all three caucuses over a long period of time because this committee at that time wanted a definition that was objective, not one that was subjective. I would suggest that the staff who administer it would like an objective definition as well. With a subjective one it's very difficult to know where you stand.

Now, as far as the proposal that documents come before the Clerk and the Speaker's office before they're published, what I said to the committee and what I'll say here again is that that's what I do personally to make certain that there isn't a problem down the road. I suggested that we might want to recommend that to other members as prudent practice, not that we make it a requirement. No such proposal was tabled before the committee. I regard it as just that, I think: prudent advice given if there is some ambiguity. But this proposal will not clear up the ambiguity. All it will do is broaden the range of the ambiguity because the range of things that might be considered partisan is potentially without limit.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. On that, did I hear that you were prepared to make a motion to table or was that just raised as a thought process?

MR. McINNIS: Well, I think I would be prepared to make a motion that it be referred to the subcommittee so that some work can be done on it before it comes back.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, we have a motion to refer. Is that debatable under our Standing Orders?

MS BARRETT: No, it isn't. A motion to table is not debatable.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is not a tabling motion, hon. member. It's a motion to refer. Thank you for your help. Discussion on the motion to refer.

Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: I would speak against the motion, but I would respectfully point out to the mover of the motion that while the precise wording of this motion was not dealt with by the subcommittee, the concept certainly was. It is a position which was brought to the subcommittee on at least one occasion, possibly two, where we discussed a tightening up of the rules so that members would

know what they could use public funds for. If you want to go out and lambaste another party, you certainly have a right to do that, but use your own money for it. Don't use public funds, which have been voted to allow you to communicate in a nonpartisan way with your own constituents about the activities that are taking place in the Legislature. I don't think that there's any value in going back to a subcommittee where we have a hung jury. That's the fact. We've been working on this for months. If the hon. member can't remember, that's his problem.

MR. McINNIS: One meeting.

MR. BOGLE: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Others speaking to the motion of referral.

MR. KOWALSKI: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, not on the question of the motion for referral; it was a question for information. I can't even remember which members of this committee are on the subcommittee. Have we heard from them as to why this is so difficult to broach? It seems pretty common sense, what we've got here before us, but there must be some background that caused some difficulty about it.

If this question is out of order at this time, Mr. Chairman, I'll accept that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I suppose you could broaden it in the sense of whether you wanted to refer it or not.

Taking it under broad guidelines in there, I'll recognize the chairman of the subcommittee to first identify who the subcommittee is.

MR. WICKMAN: The members of the subcommittee are myself, the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, Dianne, and Bob.

Mr. Chairman, speaking to members of the committee, our committee was, I believe, kind of split on this in that we did not reach a consensus. However, I will support the referral. I'll support the referral on the basis that the event that is here, section 3(b), if there's a number of amendments made to that, possibly it is acceptable. I don't have any problem, for example, where it states, "if it bears any political party logo . . . solicits political party funds or memberships." That's straight, outright politicking; there's no question about it. But when you talk in terms of personal criticism, does that mean that if I make reference to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, for example, that's personal criticism against some other member? I think this is very, very restrictive. It'd be very, very difficult to interpret. There are possibilities there if we amend this considerably and try and define very specifically so that somebody isn't left in that position where they have to pass judgment as to what is party activity or what is personal criticism.

9:25

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

On the motion to refer, additional?

MR. McINNIS: I think we're not saying that we can't live with it, just that it needs some definitions. It needs the definition of "partisan" or "nonpartisan," whichever way you look at it. I think the question of what qualifies as personal criticism needs some elaboration as well, if indeed what we're doing is tightening it up rather than loosening it up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Question with regard to the motion to refer it back to the committee. Those in favour? Opposed? The motion fails.

We're back on the main motion. The next speaker is Calgary-Foothills.

MRS. BLACK: Well, after the go-around, Mr. Chairman, I was going to ask for clarification on the intent. I understood that we were to use our communication for exactly that purpose: communicating with constituents. From what I've heard now, am I to understand that in my communication literature I could have very well gone out and said, "Today the Liberal Party has made this position, and tomorrow they'll make another position," and so on and so forth, and start naming -- I'm using your party, Percy, only as an example. Of course, their position has changed with the wind, with whatever the tide may be. The same way I could name: "The New Democrats have this position, and we are opposed to that as the Conservative Party." I think that clearly is a partisan activity. I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to define that that would be partisan.

I was under the impression all along, from the time I was elected, that you could say, "We believe that this is the right position," and you wouldn't necessarily have to communicate what changes the Liberals may have had in their philosophy or policy or even the New Democrats. I've never felt that was appropriate or even intended in any of this communication allowance. That comes at campaign time.

I guess I'm asking for clarification of if in fact we are allowed to go out and list in our newsletters the number of changes that the Liberals have made in their policies and the same with the New Democrats. I'm a little surprised that people would do that. I'm asking: are we allowed to do that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: How have you been interpreting, Clerk together with legal counsel?

DR. McNEIL: Well, I guess we've been interpreting it in relation to what the guideline, the present order, says.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And after the fact.

DR. McNEIL: And after the fact. I can think back to the ones that we've raised issue with. I won't be specific in terms of members, but there were a number where there were personal criticisms of other members and imputation of certain motives or wrongdoings that we felt were improper. In one instance we felt that the advocacy of a certain candidate in an election was inappropriate for a constituency newsletter.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, what's happened in those instances? Is the member paid?

DR. McNEIL: In some instances the member has accepted the administration's view on the newsletter; in other instances they've come to the committee. There is an appeal mechanism in the order that allows the member to make an appeal first to the Speaker and then to the committee for a final judgment on whether or not the particular issue fits or doesn't fit. That's the appeal mechanism. Administration just makes an initial judgment and then there is an appeal mechanism to that judgment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So there's been sometimes full payment and other times partial repayment.

DR. McNEIL: Some agreement reached as to what should happen.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Foothills, we didn't finish all your comments, I gather.

MRS. BLACK: Well, just on that point, Mr. Chairman, then am I to understand that "partisan" means identification of the party? Is that not the meaning of partisan?

MR. CHAIRMAN: At least one if not two have had party logos on them.

MRS. BLACK: Well, "party logo" is stated in (2). But "partisan": would that not be identification of a political party?

DR. McNEIL: Of a specific party, I would think it would be, yes.

MRS. BLACK: So really "nonpartisan" means that you should not be identifying a political party. Am I missing something there, or have we changed the meaning of the word "partisan"? Does anybody have a dictionary?

MS BARRETT: Let me just throw a little monkey wrench in. See, you face difficulty if you say, for example, that we can't cite the names of political parties. How about if I give a quote from the House in which Dick Johnston says: "I've got a quote. The New Democrats say this, and such and such says that, but we the Conservatives, with our balanced budget . . ." You see, that's a quote from *Hansard*. That's a public domain document. That's the real McCoy. What do you do about that? What about if I want to say who voted which way on what subject, let's say under a standing vote? What if I want to refer to that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Under the standing vote it's certainly fine, because it's public record.

MS BARRETT: Okay; that's my point. You see, if you want to imply a restriction on the concept of what is nonpartisan and what is partisan, there are other ways of getting around it. I don't think that this actually will satisfy the test that you're looking for.

MR. BOGLE: Well, then pay for it out of your own pocket.

MS BARRETT: I mean, that's pretty bullyish, Bob.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just for a moment with respect to the example of a recorded vote in the House: you're recorded by your name; you're not recorded by your party. The people out there have to be able to figure out what party you're in. It's fairly obvious that they can do it, but, you see, it's by a slightly different method.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, but if I wanted to, for example, make the case that, gee, there is no urban/rural split here. For example, the standing vote went as follows: all of the members voting in favour of or against the motion were of one political party. Is this partisan? Again, like I say, you know, in the House you can use the names of political parties all you want. All I have to do is take an extract from *Hansard*. I really think this needs to be accompanied by definitions. I don't think it's impossible to come to an agreement on definitions and perhaps spell out mechanisms.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think the main concern that I have on the few cases that have come to me: the first thing I look for is to make certain somebody's not really slandering, making unfounded allegations against another individual.

MS BARRETT: You just used a good word, you see: slander. That's very specific.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's the problem: trying to protect members from themselves as well as from each other.

MR. McINNIS: The mover of the motion says that the purpose is to avoid naming political parties and naming other members. The motion unfortunately doesn't say that. It uses other words which in the mover's mind mean that but from an objective account don't necessarily. My colleague has just cited some examples of where names of parties and names of members could be used in a nonpartisan fashion. So really the two are not the same thing. This is what we're trying to get at. If you're aiming to ban the naming of political parties and the naming of other members, then why don't you say so in black and white instead of using these other words, "nonpartisan" and "personal criticism," because the difficulty here is purely one of definition.

The definition that we have under (b), which was arrived at after a lengthy period of consultation between all three parties, is intended to put a definition on what is partisanship. That's what it's intended to do. Now, obviously the mover of the motion feels that that's inadequate, because there are certain things going on that he wants to eliminate. I think to some degree we can agree on what those things are. What we need to do is to spell it out, that's all, so that people aren't trying to administer words that don't have any meaning within the terms of the order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Additional? Calgary-Glenmore, and then Taber-Warner.

9:35

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, the discussion we're having here is much like our committee discussion. We're just going around in circles, and you can see why we never got anywhere there. I think to be hung up on a definition of "nonpartisan" is really irrelevant. We're trying to adopt a principle and a guideline for administration to follow. The whole idea of a newsletter is to communicate to your constituents as a member, not to slander other parties. That is very clear. To get into specific definitions of "nonpartisan" is really not the issue here. The issue is to clarify to administration that we're here to communicate to our constituents as MLAs, not to slander other parties. That's, I think, the general principle that we're here to adopt.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Taber-Warner, and then we'll call for the vote.

MR. BOGLE: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Dianne has expressed my thoughts very well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hold it, hon. member. One other member is frantically waving, and he should come in before because he has summation as mover. Thank you.

Barrhead.

MR. KOWALSKI: The discussion is a very interesting one. I appreciate what my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore has said, I really do. Sometimes, though, it's important to try and have a better understanding of what definitions are too. I can relate or understand. I want to read an example, Mr. Chairman. Maybe someone around the table, with all the wisdom, would be able to help me lead in a certain way with respect to it.

If what we're suggesting in here is that section 3(a) relates to nonpartisan communication, that's just understanding you shouldn't use the name of another political party. But there's a flip side of that. In your own communication how often can you use the name of your own political party? Is it an understanding you can't use the name of another political party but you certainly can use the name of your own political party?

Here's just a paragraph -- it's one of many that one could extrapolate -- from a recent document that was put out by a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Whether or not the word -- what was the word that you used, Ms Barrett?

MR. McINNIS: Slander?

MR. KOWALSKI: Slander, something like that.

We condemned the government for treating its senior citizens with little regard for their contribution to our province or their right to live in dignity. Even after repeated protests from [Alberta] Liberal . . . And the thing goes on. The point here is: where do we find the line here? One could almost argue that some of those words were of the type that were slanderous. Then they promoted the Alberta Liberal position. If in the definition you cannot use another party, does that mean you can also not use your own in this kind of documentation that's written? This, by the way, was a document put out by the MLA for Calgary-North West in the fall of 1991. There are many, many, many examples. Presumably public money was used for this. Could the Clerk or someone else help me in understanding this?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I doubt that we have the wisdom of Solomon.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, the member has put forward a pretty clear example. I think an answer is required. Does that defend this or doesn't it?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to speak again on the main motion. I'm very, very perturbed by the process that we're now following. We're supposed to be an all-party committee where we're looking after the interests of all three parties. It has been pointed out that a motion was dumped on us at the last minute that we've had no opportunity to take to our caucuses ahead of time. We've had no chance to thoroughly debate. You make reference to the Member for Taber-Warner summing up. It appears that this motion is going to be railroaded through one way or the other over our objections without us having the opportunity to debate it any further. I resent what's happening. I don't think it's right. I think we should have much further opportunity to discuss a specific motion that has the type of implications this one presently has.

If you want to talk in terms of the existing system, and it has been raised by a member here, there is the existing system, there is a process, and it's been tested by your office. It's been tested by this particular committee. We've had members come to this committee and appeal grievances that were filed against them as far as payment for mail drops that were done. It may not have worked to everybody's satisfaction, but it's been, generally speaking, relatively fair. That is still in there. Having that in there along with maybe just simply stating reference specifically to political party logo, to solicitation of party funds or memberships, is acceptable. I think that has to be debated in further depth, and we in opposition have to be given the opportunity to be part of that discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Taber-Warner in summation.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, as has been pointed out, this matter has been dealt with over a considerable period of time. There have been several meetings of the committee. We have not been able to come to a conclusion as a committee. The purpose of this motion is to agree to a process. I'm certainly open to further refinements or further definitions if that's deemed appropriate by the full committee, if the full committee were to direct the committee to go back and look at that matter further, but I believe the time has come to make some decisions, and the decisions should be based on the motion as presented.

It's important, John, when reviewing it, that you look at the words contained in the motion and not add to them. Several times you made reference to the impressions or interpretations I was placing on it. It's my motion. I know what's in it. Very clearly the section dealing with other members refers to personal criticism of another member. That's not the place for your communication to your own constituents. You have ample opportunity to do that with the media where there's no cost to you, through your own party newsletters or publications, or other avenues. In terms of using government funds, the primary purpose was to allow the member to communicate directly with his or her constituents on their activities and what is happening in the Legislature.

I believe the motion should be passed. I believe it should be accepted that this is the way we're moving. If the committee as a whole believes that the subcommittee should sit down again and look at some definitions or parameters within the context of this motion, then I believe that would be appropriate, but it's time to move. The discussion has been held. It's now time to move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion before the committee is this. We'll read it because we have other observers in the room.

Section 3 is amended

(a) in subsection (1) by striking out:

expenses related generally to communication between the Member and his [or her] constituents and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing to pay for

and substituting:

which relate to nonpartisan communication between the Member and his constituents, including payment for

and

(b) by repealing subsection (2) and substituting:

An item may not be paid for under subsection (1) if it bears any political party logo, promotes political party activities, solicits political party funds or memberships, or contains personal criticism of another member.

Those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? Motion carries.

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, I would assume that we would ask Parliamentary Counsel to put this in the form of an order then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: A Members' Services order?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. McINNIS: Just for the information of members, the dictionary definition of "partisan" is:

a firm adherent to a party, faction, cause, or person; esp : one exhibiting blind, prejudiced, and unreasoning allegiance.

Words to contemplate.

9:45

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

We're now going to 4(b), security mechanisms. The Sergeant-at-Arms will come and report.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, with regard to the security discussion. The Sergeant-at-Arms is here, if you would, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, while the Sergeant-at-Arms is coming . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: He's right behind you.

MR. WICKMAN: . . . I wish to speak on a point of order, if you would allow me. I've sat here for almost an hour kind of stewing, debating in my mind as to what I should do. Sometimes there are principles that are very, very strong.

First of all, the timing of this particular meeting, as your office was fully aware of ahead of time, was not acceptable to our caucus because we had a retreat. That retreat, of course, was canceled to accommodate myself, being the only member here. I hear now the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place saying they've had some problems, yet I was informed that I was the only one that had difficulties with these dates.

But more important than that, Mr. Chairman: when I came in this morning and saw the type of access I have into this room, it is unacceptable to me. I have fought for 20 years to create awareness of accessibility in this very building. We've had Rick Hansen come through. Then I come to a meeting and have to face this: that I can't freely go in and out if I want to go outside and have a discussion. I can't without having somebody assist me. On principle I want that recorded. I refuse to come back in this room again after I leave. I must do that on principle, because that to me is very, very important, and sometimes you have to force an issue.

As far as the . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. Are you finished on that point?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good; thank you.

As far as discussion, just for the record, with respect to the first item, the matter of setting a time for these particular meetings, it carries forward that I make a request through the vice-chairman. He's the one who relates first to the New Democrat caucus as the Official Opposition as to their time schedule and secondly with yourself, and then I wait to hear back what the consensus is. It was reported back to me that these dates were acceptable. That's point number one.

With regard to the second, the Chair early this morning not only did its best, in co-operation with the public works minister, to make this facility available to yourself -- two special ramps have been constructed; I appreciate the fact that this one particular ramp is very steep indeed -- but also made certain that the Sergeant-at-Arms and others of us would be here to be able to be of assistance to you at all times. I also apologize to you for that. I also pointed out, which is quite evident to all members of the Assembly, that because we have been trying to upgrade the sound system in there, in particular to help members of the House who are hard of hearing -- which relates to at least one individual in your caucus. We're attempting to try to upgrade the whole facility. We were not blessed in time past with foresight to be able to have this building constructed originally to take all these considerations into effect. With respect to this particular room, it's one that's large enough to be able to handle what needs to be done here. We were finding the Confederation Room was indeed too small to accommodate all the people that need to be here, especially when it comes to budget consultations.

I have apologized to you before. I apologize publicly on behalf of the Assembly. I also point out that we have taken extra regard and have been trying to be as available as possible, but I understand your position entirely. I would also point out that when we did the

renovations to the Chamber, we made the Chamber the most wheelchair accessible in the whole nation. So we're committed to that, hon. member. But I also understand that it creates inconvenience for you. When you do indeed leave this meeting, I am sorry that you feel that you will not be able to come back, but I can't do otherwise.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I feel terrible that there isn't some way of making an accommodation, but again, on principle -- I don't know how difficult it has to be for me to drill home a point. I'm a very independent person. I'm not accustomed to having to have assistance, and it's unacceptable.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I understand completely.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I think the reason for the selection of this room must be explained. The Legislative Assembly has repairs going on. The Confederation Room, you argue, is too small. What about the Carillon Room? This one is a difficult one for Mr. Wickman to approach. I understand that completely. I have no argument at all with that, none whatsoever. Is there another facility that can be used?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we could go back and see what other rooms can be bumped.

MS BARRETT: We've met in the Carillon Room before, haven't we?

MR. KOWALSKI: I'm not sure we have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll check and see if other meetings can be moved.

May we now go on to the next item, or are there any other comments that need to be voiced? Item 4(b).

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Member for Barrhead for his comments.

Item 4(b). I had the opportunity of touring with the Sergeant-at-Arms the system that has been put in place in a small number of constituency offices for experimental purposes. I must say it is superb. It's excellent. If somewhere down the line the subcommittee wants that same type of demonstration, the Sergeant-at-Arms is prepared to make it available. The cost is extremely reasonable. I found the cost to be remarkably low for the constituency offices. It must be kept in mind that the system is not only a system to protect staff that are in the constituency office, but it's also an alarm-type system to reduce the risk of break-ins and thefts, and that has been occurring within constituency offices. I wholeheartedly endorse the system.

The only question that now remains is where those dollars come from. In view of the budget restraint we're facing -- and it's very obvious as we go through this documentation that every budget including yours, Mr. Chairman, is facing the axe -- it becomes impossible for me as an individual MLA to advocate that this system be done out of your overall budget. I think that's unfair to you. I think we should endorse this system. We should allow those constituencies that feel it's vital to go ahead and proceed with it and pay the \$800 cost out of their existing constituency budget, and if they can't do it this year, then to budget accordingly next year.

I can't say enough for the system, and I appreciate the Sergeant-at-Arms' giving me the opportunity to view firsthand just how excellent it is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Do you have the wording of a motion that you're going to bring forward that would further that end?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, my motion is that this committee accept the proposal that has been prepared previously by the Sergeant-at-Arms and other Legislative Assembly staff and that those constituency offices that wish to implement the system do so at their own constituency expense.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: It's a question for Oscar for clarification. Is the cost \$200 per system or \$800?

MR. LACOMBE: Approximately \$800. About \$400 and some for the equipment, and depending on where you are and the space for the installation, the charge may vary a little bit. But bank on, say, approximately \$800.

MR. McINNIS: I would just like to relate that our constituency office was broken into over the Remembrance Day long weekend. They took all of the business machines: the fax machine, the photocopier, the computer, laser printer, even the coffeepot. There was no security device in there. We've since had a security system installed. I think it works quite well, because on one occasion when there was a problem, I got a call at 2 o'clock in the morning from the security people here. So it's fairly evident they're monitoring that thing pretty closely.

Cost is a consideration, but when you consider the cost of replacing what, for us, amounted to \$10,000 worth of office equipment, you don't have to save very many of those to justify the expenditure, plus it provides some personal security for the assistant and some fire protection as well. I think we should attempt to find the money if we can. I certainly agree that the system as it's proposed functions very efficiently.

9:55

MR. LACOMBE: If I may add something, Mr. Chairman. A comparative cost to install that in your home would be \$2,500 to \$3,000 for the same type of equipment, plus a maintenance charge of \$25 a month. For this one here utilizing the RITE system, there is no maintenance charge -- it's the initial cost -- and it's quite easily removed from one location to another.

MR. CHAIRMAN: How many break-ins have we had in constituency offices?

MR. LACOMBE: We've had approximately five to seven break-ins a year. Of course, I don't make that public knowledge.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's all right. I asked the question on purpose just so that members of the committee would know it's not just an isolated thing. I guess there are a few people out there that think the Provincial Treasurer keeps the heritage fund in each of your constituency offices.

Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: I just want clarification. Is the motion that the constituency offices and constituency budgets pay for the . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MS BARRETT: That's what I thought. Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

MS BARRETT: Okay, but is it a command? Like, is it a directive?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, no. No, no. It's optional.

MR. WICKMAN: For those that choose to exercise it.

MS BARRETT: I chose it years ago, actually.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. I always like to use that word whenever it's able to be used.

Item 4(c), survey of postal expenditures, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thanks. Mr. Chairman, I should report to members of this committee that the members on the postage subcommittee happen to be the same members that were looking at this book proposal. So we had a discussion a few weeks ago at the end of another meeting on the book proposal, and Blake McDougall was present for that meeting. He offered to get us some updated information on postage.

Now, what had happened is that when we first looked at this issue in July -- I'll just read into the record. Government members -- that is, non Executive Council members -- spent \$3,440 on large mail-outs or just mail-outs. In the same month, July, the New Democrat caucus spent \$2,819, and the Liberal caucus had spent \$14,563. Now, at the time, Percy, who is on the committee, said, "Well, this is an extraordinary case." So we said: "Well, okay. We'll hang around and watch." I must say that we had talked about proceeding perhaps with a formula for caucus mailings if it was necessary, but I should say that what's happened is that the Liberal caucus mailings have decreased substantially since then and in fact they ended up having the lowest costs in December of all three caucuses.

Therefore, I would recommend -- now, this is not official; I don't speak on behalf of the subcommittee, really, because we had come to one idea and then we got this information that's dated January 3. I don't know what date I got it, a couple of days ago maybe. What's today, Thursday? Maybe I got it Monday or Tuesday. I would recommend that we leave the system as is and continue to monitor it and see if there becomes a problem in terms of, you know, one caucus spending five or eight times as much as another.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there's really no motion required to leave it status quo.

MS BARRETT: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you.

Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Taber-Warner.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments from Edmonton-Highlands pointing out specifically the reductions that have been made in the postage costs against the Liberal caucus. There were instances where we felt that it was extremely important documentation; for example, the material that we had prepared within our caucus on A Single Great Nation, the constitutional question and such, which was sent to many, many people throughout the province and requested by many, many people and very, very well received, and secondly, the response we prepared to the whole question of the health care recommendations that were coming down as a result of the Rainbow Report. There

were some instances where we had massive mail-outs, extremely large mail-outs, and we don't have that liberty or that opportunity of having a cabinet minister under that portfolio to say that because this is health care or this is Environment, we're going to send out 25,000 copies to interested groups and parties throughout the province. We can't do that. We have to do it through our caucus office, and of course it does show up in the budget.

In respect for the fact that these are very, very difficult economic times and we all have to be on our toes and watch every possible dollar where at all possible, we in the last six months have made an extremely concentrated effort to reduce our postage requirements. Unfortunately, it means at times that we can't communicate the way we would like to communicate with Albertans, but we intend to continue on this basis of exercising that restraint that has been demonstrated. We would hope that this committee does not consider imposing restrictions that would say that we are only allowed to communicate with Albertans, with constituents throughout the province, to a certain degree. So I wholeheartedly agree with the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. BOGLE: Well, I have a request of administration, because I was under the impression that we would have had a motion to deal with the issue today. I appreciate Pam's comments as chairman of the subcommittee relative to the expenditures by the three caucuses, particularly in the last three months of the 1991 calendar year, but I do remain concerned about the open-endedness of this area when we're trying to budget, we're trying to exercise restraint. I would ask the administration, so that when we're dealing with the budget and approving budget items -- and that will come sometime in the future; it won't happen today or tomorrow is my understanding. I would like to see two things done. I'd like to see the three caucuses' -- the government caucus, the Official Opposition, and the Liberal opposition -- dollars totaled, and I would like to see the numbers applied according to the formula that we had agreed to in principle, which would see, if we were using the Official Opposition as a benchmark of 100, the Liberal caucus at 50, and the government caucus, recognizing that not all government members are private members -- a number have portfolios or are members of cabinet -- at 125. I'd like to see those numbers applied so that nothing would be taken away in the global sense.

On the constituency offices as well, I'd like to see number crunching done on dividing that total figure by the 83 MLAs. Each MLA is allowed a constituency office, so if we allocated the dollars based on 83 constituencies, then there would indeed be a control both in our three caucuses and in the constituency. Now, it may be that we will decide that that's not necessary, but I'd like to see the numbers worked up so that we can see exactly where we are and apply any postal rate increases that we are looking at to these figures.

DR. McNEIL: Just so I understand. You'd like the projected budget allocation for next year broken down . . .

MR. BOGLE: Or the actual.

DR. McNEIL: . . . in terms of using the formula as to how that would be allocated in terms of the MLA administration budget which the three caucus postage budgets would be in, and as well, you'd like the sum of the constituency office?

MR. BOGLE: Yeah, dividing that by 83, because all members of the Assembly, whether they're in cabinet or not . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: . . . have the right to speak to their constituents, do the mailing.

10:05

DR. McNEIL: There are two sources of funding for mailings. One is the central budget, and then there's a communications allowance within the constituency offices.

MR. BOGLE: I'm dealing with the central budget. I'm assuming that the figure that appears here under Constituency Offices is central.

DR. McNEIL: That's correct, yeah.

MR. BOGLE: That's what I'm referring to. I'm not talking about the constituency allocation, which is separate.

DR. McNEIL: Okay. Fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff, then Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, to the Member for Taber-Warner. When you were talking about government members, were you talking about the pro rata used in cabinet or reducing cabinet and the Speaker and having ordinary members -- the basis versus the whole?

MR. BOGLE: For clarification, there are two separate elements to the discussion, the item we had agreed to in principle for government members, opposition members, and Liberal opposition. Government members deal with private members of the Assembly, not the cabinet ministers, not the Speaker. We would use the ND figure as a benchmark at 100 points. The Liberal caucus, which is half the size of the ND caucus, would be 50, half that amount, and the government members would be 125. On the constituency offices, because we're dealing with 83 constituencies, you deal with it in a slightly different way, by looking at the dollars spent by central administration -- this is not dollars spent in our constituency offices through our own constituency allocation -- coming up with a figure that's equal across the province.

MR. HYLAND: Which in reality then supports in part, not in total but in part, the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud in that there are some things that cabinet may send out, whereas the government members, when we're approximately twice the opposition, don't receive twice the money but receive 25 percent more than they do, because there is some recognition of that balance.

MR. BOGLE: That's correct. That was the basis for the tentative, not unanimous, agreement that we had in the committee by the majority of members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands, then Grande Prairie.

MS BARRETT: First of all, I'd like to point out to the committee here that the total money spent on mailings from this building comes to less than some government departments; you know, a couple of individual government department mailings. So it's not really out of control in that sense, I would argue.

I'd like to ask a question about the constituency offices. I don't get it. It says, "Does not include bulk mail-outs made from constituency office allowance," which means the MLA householder, right? I don't get it. What can you do, bring your mail from the constituency office to the Leg. and mail it? I don't understand this.

MR. McDOUGALL: I've gotten involved in this in the middle of the stream. These figures come from the mail room. It's my understanding that the material that is brought in from the constituency offices -- the mail room staff try to identify it, and if it's a bulk-type mailing, the money is charged back to the constituency office.

MS BARRETT: Okay. So it is the constituency offices that are paying for that \$88,000 overall; it's not out of the Leg. Assembly budget.

MR. McDOUGALL: No, it's my understanding that that amount is being paid from the MLA Admin budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's coming back into our main budget because public works are identifying it as coming from this envelope.

MS BARRETT: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is part of our problem, as I understand it, in the department: that we really have no control over which MLA comes in here and dumps a whole pile of mail on us to have us pay for it instead of it coming out of his or her own constituency mailing. I mean, we have no guidelines in here. It's a floating figure, which we have no control over. We've had some members come in and do that.

MS BARRETT: I didn't know you could.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I didn't know either until we got into this. Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: The other thing that happens is that constituency offices request from general administration a certain amount of postage, and they have postage meters. That's for individual mailings, and according to members' services orders at the present time, those come out of that central pool of funds. It's the bulk mailings that come out of the constituency offices.

MS BARRETT: I want to see the figures too. I don't get it. [interjections] Okay, yeah, right. Let's get the figures.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think it's necessary. It would be nice to shove it all back in one.

All right. Grande Prairie, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. ELLIOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The recent discussion here since I put my hand up is starting to focus on one of the things I find rather worrisome, and that is why our committee is here in the first place. By definition and by title we're called the Members' Services Committee, and we're talking about services provided to members of the Assembly and our constituency offices, things like salaries and pensions and other things: members' services. It's always bothered me that whenever we get into a discussion, it seems we get on a tangent where we're trying to be a political party services committee, not members' services. I can't believe that we talk about such things as parties within this discussion and that we try to make allowances for political parties. It doesn't make sense. We're here to look after members and the needs of that member, him or her, relative to serving their constituency and their constituents in the constituency. But our discussion, unfortunately -- and I can't understand why -- gets expanded into these other things.

Now, in this particular system we live in, the party that wins the election forms the government, and the government has a responsi-

bility to all Albertans. No individual member sitting at this table has the responsibility to all Albertans. I'm responsible just to my constituents. This is my assumption, Mr. Chairman. If I'm wrong, then I'd like to be straightened out. But if we're going to start to make postage available to any particular elected member so they can send mail-outs to the entire province, then we're going to have to expand that to include other Albertans. I've got people in my constituency who would just love to write a letter and have it dropped in every mailbox in this province because they're so mad at this government or whoever. Maybe they'd like to put their bill for postage into some envelope here too. That's extending it along to the ridiculous, but I'm trying to make a point, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that we have to somehow redefine our thinking as to why we have this particular committee of the Legislature.

Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move that the matter be referred back to the subcommittee headed up by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I was not aware in our subcommittee discussions that we had actually approved in principle a formula, or that some members had. I know we had talked about it, but I don't recall us ever doing anything formal with it other than kind of looking at the thing. There was some indication given to me by the chairman of the committee that a written motion would be provided to me prior to this meeting so I could take it to our caucus, and that of course was not done. Now the member has indicated that she doesn't intend to proceed, so I understand why that motion isn't here. I don't have any objection to the thing going back to the committee, looking at these additional figures that have been spoken about, and putting something down that may be a little more concrete. Let's remember too, Mr. Chairman and all committee members: let's not get carried away in this one area, that we do attempt to communicate with Albertans so Albertans know what government is doing, the people they've elected to represent them.

We can talk in terms of restraint, and we're all sitting here in favour of restraint. We can look at all types of things. We can look at the size of cabinet, for example, and we can look at savings here and savings there. Let's not make it too restrictive so that it forces any caucus to really limit their ability to communicate with the people that do elect them, but I don't have any difficulty if something within reason is proposed. Now, the formula that we're talking about that the Member for Taber-Warner talked about -- 125-75-50, whatever -- I guess that has to be based on what figures are we talking about initially? Are we talking about 50 percent of \$20,000, 50 percent of \$100,000? What specifically are we talking about? What would be the impact of this type of principle on our caucus and the New Democrat caucus and the Tory caucus?

So I'd like to see it go back where we can have some more meaningful discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion to refer. Speaking to the motion, Taber-Warner, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Foothills.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, the member can make a motion that a matter be referred back to a subcommittee. That's fine, but we must go back to what was originally asked for, Percy. I asked for some information to be provided by the administration so that when we are dealing with the budget estimates and we're ready to make decisions -- and that could be as early as next week -- we as a committee are prepared to make decisions. Now, the decision-making process marches on. We can meet in subcommittees till the cows come home, but when we get to the budget process, my recommendation to this committee is that we be ready to make decisions, and they're decisions that will affect the 1992-93 budget

estimates. To ensure that we have adequate information so we can make those decisions, I've made a request, and when we get to the decision-making process, you may have a different opinion on what the final outcome should be. That's fine; it should be considered. I'm merely asking for information so that when we do get into that mode, we can move on.

10:15

MR. CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Foothills, Cypress-Redcliff.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, it's my understanding that this information we have before us has already been made available to the subcommittee and has been discussed in that subcommittee.

MS BARRETT: No, not the current stuff. We just got it a few days ago.

MRS. MIROSH: But relatively, up to whenever the committee met, the date that they met, this information . . .

MR. WICKMAN: No, not the last six months, Dianne.

MS BARRETT: No; we just got this a few days ago. Look at the date. It's dated January 3.

MR. HYLAND: We had it about July, August.

MRS. MIROSH: Looking at the bottom numbers for all parties and the discrepancy in the expenditure I think is very relevant to the budget, as the Member for Taber-Warner already suggested. In that book, I mean, you've got a difference bearing from \$40,000 up to almost \$70,000 from one party to the next, and I don't know how you could possibly operate a budget where there's an open end like that. I mean, these costs of \$14,000 a month could be every month because I'm sure the Liberal Party could say, "Well, there's an issue that came up every month," and probably justify it.

I don't know, Mr. Chairman, how you could possibly operate a budget with an open-ended figure like that. There isn't any department in government that can do it. So going back to subcommittee to say, "Well, we're going to remain status quo," really doesn't answer our question. We have to discuss budgets tomorrow and next week. You can't have an open-ended cost like that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Calgary-Foothills, Cypress-Redcliff, Edmonton-Jasper Place on the motion to refer.

MRS. BLACK: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't feel we can refer this as stated by Taber-Warner. We are on to budget time here, and I think it is apparent when you look at these numbers -- and it was something the Member for Grande Prairie alluded to, that we are here as a Members' Service Committee to determine how to service the constituents we represent. I think sometimes we do lose sight of that. When you look at the numbers -- and you realize that when you're servicing your constituency, you have a constituency allowance. In addition, you have a little fund in here to do special mail-outs. When you look at the one caucus -- and it's your caucus, Percy -- it has spent more money than the other two caucuses combined.

MR. WICKMAN: We work a bit harder.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MRS. BLACK: I really think, Mr. Chairman, with due respect, when you stand up and talk about fiscal restraint and you have eight members, therefore eight constituencies to communicate with, and we have 32 private members and the opposition 16, I think it's a little bit out of line to expect your caucus members to spend more than the other two combined on communication. Now, surely if you need to communicate provincially, you have a political party that does fund-raising that could do that communication for you, like the other two caucuses have political parties to make communications for them and associations throughout.

I think this is a critical area, and I don't think it can be referred back to another committee study. From this morning it looks like we haven't accomplished an awful lot from our subcommittees that have been working for the last year. We have some decisions to make in the next three or four days as to budget trends, and certainly we cannot go into this next year with an open-ended budget for postage that would be as ludicrous as what has happened in the last year. I appreciate the request for information and the pro rata rationing of postage of 50-100-125. I'll be interested to see those numbers. But I think this is totally unacceptable, particularly for a party that stands up and yells and screams restraint to have spent more than the other two parties combined when in our party we have four times the members. This is unacceptable, and it has to be dealt with now. I don't know how we could proceed with budget discussions without dealing with this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Member for Edmonton- . . .

MS BARRETT: Me?

MR. HYLAND: . . . Highlands -- I forgot the name for a minute -- made reference to a request that was made in preparation for budgets last year when we were looking at the postal figures, asking for seven departments. Blake has just handed me the document that the committee had back some time ago that outlines those seven. We picked seven departments at that time, on December 17, '90, and on January 14, '91. It asks at that time, I believe, to watch it for six or eight months so that we would be prepared. I think if we go back and look at the motion, it went something to the effect of: look at it so that we would be prepared next budget year to make a decision, and that time is here. I think with the additional information the Member for Taber-Warner has asked for, we should be prepared to make a decision on the postage. If a decision is needed or if it's okay to let it go, we should at that time be prepared to make that decision. I mean, it's gone on for 13 months now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the additional information as requested of the Clerk could be available certainly by Monday. Right? Thank you.

DR. McNEIL: At the latest.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At the latest.

Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud, and that will be enough.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some sympathy for the people on this committee who feel that having an item in the

budget which is not strictly limited is an uncomfortable situation to be in. Whether you're dealing with personal finances or a business corporation or a department of government, I don't think any administrator would like to have a situation like that, and I think our own administration has expressed their concern over that.

We do have to realize, though, that this is not a department of government we're dealing with here; this is the Legislative Assembly. In that respect there are certain privileges that are pretty important, and I think some of us ought to think about how far we're prepared to go to defend that. Now, sometimes in the nature of privileges they get abused, but that doesn't mean you do away with the privileges in order to avoid abuse, especially given that what we're talking about is a very important matter of communication with the public, and that's something we're all involved in.

Some people think it's unfair that the Liberals, for example, spend more than both parties combined. I think we should all realize that it doesn't necessarily do them the kind of good they maybe think it does, because the volume of the material they send out, some of it taking the positions of pro and anti choice, pro and anti game ranching, and all the rest of it, does catch up with them after a while.

I would hope that when we look at this item, we consider that MLAs have a right to communicate, particularly with people who communicate with them. If you get a communication from somebody, an Albertan, about a particular issue, I don't think this committee should take any action to limit the ability of members to respond. I'm not particularly comfortable with the numbers either, but I recognize them as being what happens in a democratic society. I think this issue has been faced by parliaments and legislatures around the world. I don't know if you'd find that many that are strictly limiting. I think there is a higher principle we should think about. The numbers don't provide for a lot of comfort, but on the other hand, they're not breaking the bank either. The total amount in respect of -- I guess this document isn't totaled yet -- \$263,000 for every element in comparison with a \$20 million budget is large, but I don't think it's the kind of thing we need to push the panic button over and think about severely limiting the ability to respond to people who communicate with us.

Also, if we want to use the analogy of government departments, we should think about the kinds of mailing costs that go out from various departments. One of the departments I shadow, for example, has a mailing list of some 25,000 to 30,000 names, some of whom want to get off and can't. They get departmental mission statements and copies of draft legislation that never gets passed, including a consultative strategy, Water Resources Act reviews, and these things on and on whether they want them or not. The Environment department is not one of the big spenders at \$350,000. Social services spends \$1.6 million; health care, \$2.8 million; Education, \$800,000; Labour, \$235,000; Agriculture . . .

10:25

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, hon. member. We don't need to go through every department.

MR. McINNIS: I think the point is that virtually every department of government spends more than the Legislative Assembly does in total on postage, so we're not talking about something that is actually driving the cost of government up. I think what we're actually talking about, just like the previous issue, is that some people around this table want to limit the ability of other voices to be heard via the mail, whereas the government has ample resources to get its message out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud wanted to respond to some comment made. This is not summation of the debate, but it is the end of the debate on the motion.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The comments made by the Member for Calgary . . .

MRS. BLACK: Foothills.

MR. WICKMAN: Foothills; of course. The function of a caucus is not to simply respond to the constituencies of those members that are elected. In other words, we don't only get correspondence from the eight constituencies we represent. We get correspondence from all over Alberta, even from Calgary-Foothills, and people are asking for a response. People want to know what our caucus feels about this point of view or that point of view. Are we prepared to support this type of legislation? We have the responsibility to communicate with those Albertans, not only the people within our own constituencies. The purpose of constituency communication, of course, is addressed by the constituency offices, to refer specifically there.

I think we've got to put this thing in proper perspective, Mr. Chairman. The point has been made about the more global type budgets we see within cabinet offices. I'm afraid we're starting to be picky here on an item that is an integral part of the democratic process, where you start talking in terms of attempting to curtail the right of a member to communicate with the very same people that have put that person there or may put others there, and it's very, very important. But from the point of view of having something in the books that the Legislative Assembly or the Members' Services staff can look at and say, from a budget point of view, X number of dollars here or X number of dollars there, a ceiling, fine, I'm prepared to discuss that again. Again, I go on record saying that I want to see specifically what the numbers are to that type of formula. To say 50 percent of whatever is not good enough. I need something I can take back to my caucus and say, "Are we prepared to accept this, are we prepared to move a further amendment, or exactly what?" No one has specifically told me yet what we are dealing with. I want the numbers, and we don't have the numbers.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. I think that when you examine the transcript you'll see there was a formula that was mentioned more than once.

The motion moved by yourself is to refer the matter to committee. All those in favour of the motion to refer back to the committee? Opposed? The motion for a referral is defeated.

MR. HYLAND: Question on the main motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There was no main motion. There was a request for additional information, which the Clerk has undertaken with his staff to bring back to the meeting if not by tomorrow then certainly by Monday. So that can be available for discussion when we get on with the budget. Thank you.

Item 4(d).

MR. BOGLE: Item 4(d) is a report by a subcommittee which has been examining the possibility of a book on the history of the Alberta Legislative Assembly from 1905 to the present time. Members will recall that the Chief Electoral Officer published a book some years ago on elections in Alberta from 1905 to, I believe, the 1982 election, and a request was made by the Chief Electoral Officer of the Legislative Offices Committee for \$50,000 to update that book. That request was declined two years in a row. But the idea of a history containing more than election results is something

we did want to consider. Therefore, the Members' Services Committee did strike a subcommittee made up of Pam, Alan, Percy, and myself to review the matter.

We first of all worked closely with Blake McDougall from your staff and reviewed not only the previous book by the Chief Electoral Officer but also the book put out by the Alberta Teachers' Association entitled *A Guide to Alberta's 22nd Legislature*. We found there was a lot of very worthwhile information in the ATA book on committee structures and basically how government works and functions.

In one of our early meetings with Blake we identified a number of things we would like to look at and asked Blake to come back and price them out for us. It was our objective from the outset that we should attempt to design a proposal that would be cost recoverable, so that if we engage upon a document or book like this, we could sell it. Some members would use their constituency allowance funds to purchase copies to place in municipal libraries or school libraries or other centres. They could also be made available to the public at large. So an overriding concern or principle of the committee is that it be priced at a point that's affordable and the figures used be cost recoverable so there's no drain on the Leg. Assembly budget. If the work were to be done entirely by administrative staff and by people brought on board on a contract basis, the cost would be prohibitive; therefore, we feel that a lot of the background work, particularly the gathering of the biographical material on former members, could in fact be done by present members of the Assembly and their respective staffs.

It was viewed that we could have a double-check system. To use as an example the Member for Cypress-Redcliff, if the Member for Cypress-Redcliff were to go back and review the members of the Assembly who have served southeastern Alberta from 1905 to the present time, we would then take biographies that had been prepared and, hopefully, reviewed with family members where we do know of family members. Your office, Mr. Chairman, has a record of at least some members of the Assembly, and we would check biographies with the parties. If, for instance, there had been two members in Cypress-Redcliff in the past who were Liberal, in addition to the Member for Cypress-Redcliff co-ordinating the biography and working with the families, we'd review that with the Liberal caucus for their input and so on. The committee believes that by doing that background work ourselves we can cut the costs of the publication considerably. We would really be down to looking at the binding and printing costs as the main item.

We do not have a final report on that at this time, as we're still working on the matter. We felt it important to come back to the committee to see if you wish to proceed with that on the understanding that there be cost recovery in the objective.

We also have a table of contents, if you like, Mr. Chairman, which we'd like to distribute now. Rather than spending a lot of time on it in the committee, various members could submit back -- and I suggest we do it through the chairman of this committee, the Speaker -- any thoughts they have on the table of contents, either additions or deletions to it.

10:35

I'll very quickly run through the 11 key areas that we deemed appropriate. The first would be a biographical directory of all members, listed in alphabetical order. We'd be looking at no more than three per page. The second section would deal with a list of Lieutenant Governors, Premiers, leaders of the Official Opposition, leaders of other opposition parties, and Speakers of the Assembly. The third section might deal with the cabinet and the fourth with a list of deputy speakers, chairmen of committees, government and opposition House leaders, deputy House leaders, government and

opposition whips and deputy whips. Fifth would be standing and select committees and caucus committees. Sixth would be the Clerk of the Assembly, the Clerk Assistant, the Parliamentary Counsel, the Sergeant-at-Arms; seventh, the Ombudsman, the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the new Ethics Commissioner. Eighth would be mapping of constituencies and voting results by election. That would really be taken from the Chief Electoral Officer's book. Ninth, a flow chart of session activities, government Bills, private members' Bills, resolutions. A lot of that would be taken from the ATA manual. Tenth, services provided, including *Hansard*, the Legislature Library, Visitor Services -- under Visitor Services you would include the tours, the videotapes, the fact sheets -- and finally the cafeteria. Then, eleventh, possibly some information on symbols of the Assembly: the Crown, the Alberta coat of arms, the flag, the mace, the bar, and so on.

This is merely a suggested list. If members have ideas on how it can be improved by either deletions or additions or alterations, please forward the same through the Speaker. I'm assuming at some point in time we'll be advised, Mr. Chairman, whether you want further work done by the committee or whether we terminate our activities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This comes in as a general report. I would assume if it's agreeable with the committee, if there are no objections to this, then through the office of the Speaker we could send out an information sheet to each individual member certainly requesting them to do some initial work on the biographical outlines of all former members of their constituency. We would give a draft outline of about how many words you're after if you're going to put three to a page.

Certainly going down here and checking off a number of things, we already have a number of these lists, so it's simple enough for us to pull them together. I also work on the theory that this is really a sort of summer or off-season project after we do some of the initial work.

MR. BOGLE: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there general agreement on that with the committee?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

As you say, this does not have to be horrendously lots of money. We can tap various resources that are in place. At this point I would also point out that a lot of work in some of these areas has already been done, thanks to the work of Blake McDougall in particular and some of the library staff, especially with regard to Lieutenant Governors and Premiers. Then we have some of the other work that's already there.

Before we adjourn for a 10-minute coffee break and come back at 10 to 11, I'd like to point out that by shifting some of the other things around the building, we've made arrangements that the Carillon Room will be available for tomorrow morning's meeting.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will see what can be done with respect to those proposed for Monday and Tuesday.

[The committee adjourned from 10:39 a.m. to 10:54 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, we have a quorum and we're back at our agenda. We had agreed beforehand that we would adjourn at 12 o'clock. We knew that people were trying to balance a number of other commitments. Unfortunately, that's true all the time for all the MLAs. I know that those on Members' Services have lots of extra duties, and I guess that's one of the reasons you got appointed to Members' Services.

With regard to the agenda, we will not be discussing item 5(e) today because there's a draft Members' Services order that has to be developed. So that one we will hold until sometime in the next three or four days. We do have items 5(b), (c), and (d) to deal with.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that there was a news story today in the *Calgary Sun* whereby it would appear that one of the members of the Members' Services Committee or some staff person has released the documents of our proposed budget for the year 1992-93. Now, I'm quite happy to have copies of this run off. Maybe it's just happenstance or something or other, but I've had the staff checking the figures and it would appear that perhaps someone has been a little bit careless with their documents in the last few days or perhaps some other action has taken place. But the caution I have with it: yes, the documents in time will become public, but after all, hon. members, we have this other difficulty that members of your own caucus haven't even seen the proposed documents, and it's not fair to colleagues within your own caucus let alone colleagues in the House at large.

MS BARRETT: Can we get copies?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Absolutely. We'll have these run off, and I'll just leave it at that. Thank you.

Let's go to item 5(b), dental plan issue. Clerk, please.

DR. McNEIL: I'm circulating a proposed Members' Services order. This order relates to the extension of dental plan coverage to members to age 70. Our MLA dental coverage piggybacks on the management and opted out and excluded employees dental plans for the public service. The provisions that now exist under the management and opted out and excluded plans for extension of dental coverage to employees up to age 70 -- this was something just done in the last number of months. The previous guidelines terminated dental coverage at age 65. In order to extend this same coverage to our members, we attached the minimum required. There are three members presently affected who have reached age 65 and can therefore be covered.

The way this is administered is that the member would first be required to claim for dental work performed from the Alberta health care program for senior citizens, which currently reimburses a maximum of \$960 for dental services every two years. The portion of the member's expenses not reimbursed through Alberta health care -- in other words, that portion above \$960 -- can then be claimed from the MLA dental plan.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. The recommendation is that this Members' Services order be approved. It's here; you can approve it or not approve it.

Cypress-Redcliff, followed by Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I would move that Members' Services Order 1/92 be accepted as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: I just want to clarify. It's been quite a while since we first talked about this. This is where the members continue to pay for their own coverage, though, right?

DR. McNEIL: This is for existing members. At the present time, once they reach age 65 they're not covered by the dental plan. Because they extended the public service dental plan and our policy has been to piggyback on that plan, we're proposing that the same coverage should apply to members as applies now to public service managers.

MS BARRETT: And it's still a net contribution.

DR. McNEIL: It's something that's cost-shared between the employer and the employee, and it would continue to be the same. Yes.

MS BARRETT: We don't have any MLAs over age 65, do we?

MRS. BLACK: Don't ask.

MS BARRETT: Is that a rude question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It would only be a rude question if you were asking what gender they were.

MRS. MIROSH: There are no females.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So we have three there and three about to be there.

All right. Do I detect that there's a call for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Item 5(c). There was some correspondence from Westlock-Sturgeon to come before the committee. I see we have Mr. Wickman's name there, but he is looking puzzled.

MR. WICKMAN: I haven't seen the correspondence, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would you hand copies to all individuals?

I would think in this case -- it was my understanding that the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon would have given it to his representative on Members' Services, but let's just distribute this, and we'll leave this item to come back at a later time. The basic issue is out-of-town MLA parking costs in Edmonton. We can come back to this, if not tomorrow, on Monday. So we'll just show that this has been passed out.

Item 5(d) then. Edmonton-Highlands, you did correspond with my office about two issues that you wished to bring forward, and one was with respect to employee benefits, I do believe.

MS BARRETT: Did you keep a copy of that, David?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah.

MS BARRETT: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Here we are.

MS BARRETT: I can remember one of them off by heart.

MR. CHAIRMAN: "Conference fees payable on the Member's behalf from Constituency budgets," and second, "Long term disability coverage for benefits for Constituency staff."

MS BARRETT: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The brief letter is being handed around, and we look to item 1 only. If needs be, we can hold onto these items until Monday or Tuesday.

MS BARRETT: Sure. Maybe I could just introduce them, though.

I think in the first instance -- jeez, that's July; I can't remember that far back, you guys. Anyway, in the first instance, one of our caucus members attended a conference and wished to have that fee picked up by his constituency budget, and the interpretation of the rules was that that was not the right thing to do. Have I got that right, Sylvia? Do you remember it? Okay.

So the question is: is that the sole responsibility of caucus budgets? Are caucus budgets allowed to pick up the cost of conferences? Lately I got assigned a pretty heavy portfolio. I could go to a conference practically every day, just as Nancy Betkowski I'm sure could. It's okay for me. I don't have a family, so I can pay those conference fees, but for some people I guess it might become onerous. So I would like some . . .

MRS. MIROSH: You've got Health?

MS BARRETT: Yeah. Ray said, "Barrett, you're not working between midnight and 6 a.m.," and cracked the whip.

Anyway, I think we need to find a way to allow constituency budgets or specify that caucus budgets can pick up the costs of conference fees, depending on, you know, what sort of portfolio area you're talking about. They can become expensive. I know Energy ones are extremely expensive; we're talking 500 bucks a crack for a lot of them and, you know, a minimum of \$150 or \$200. I don't have a specific recommendation here on this item, but I think I would like this committee to find a way. Maybe we could ask the Clerk to look through our current orders to suggest a way that this could be made possible.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Clerk, isn't this the general thought: that the conference fee could be paid by a caucus budget but . . .

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. As we would administer it now, a conference fee would be appropriately paid out of a caucus budget, but there's nothing in the Members' Services orders, a constituency services order, that we can see that would provide authority to pay for conference fees out of a constituency office budget at the present time. That's not to say that if the committee determined that they wanted that to happen -- we could propose an amendment that would do that.

11:04

MS BARRETT: Uh huh. Okay.

Do you want me to go into the second item at all?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, are you happy with that, or do you want that interpretation that a caucus can indeed look after the conference fees out of its global?

MS BARRETT: Well, no. I would actually prefer it if David were able to bring us some sort of enabling proposal, at least to have it openly considered, actively considered, and debated even for five or 10 minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, first a question and then a comment, the question being: what kind of conferences are we talking about? A lot of things that MLAs get invited to, whether you're a member of a caucus committee or a critic or whatever, often you're allowed to go free. You don't have to pay the registration fee. Some you do, but the majority, if they ask you there as a guest, you go as a guest.

Secondly, are you then with your last comment indicating that you would like it as an option? Now it can be paid by a caucus fund, but also the opportunity then of the person having the option of paying by constituency, an either/or type of thing.

MS BARRETT: Yeah. That's right. I mean, I didn't come with a predetermined position on this. I would like some flexibility, but I'm open. You know, if David came back and said, "Well, the wisdom of my office would suggest that up to 3 percent of your constituency budget may be used for conference costs that you as an MLA are asked to attend and pay," that'd be fine. I'm essentially asking for his wisdom to come back to us for open consideration. I don't have a solid position.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, if I may. And types of conferences?

MS BARRETT: I'm open. Like I say, I didn't come . . .

MR. HYLAND: I just wondered in the one case if you could outline the type of conference.

MS BARRETT: I can find out and report tomorrow on that. I just can't remember now.

MR. HYLAND: Okay. I'm just assuming that if there are conferences of groups, not of political things but of groups . . .

MS BARRETT: Oh, no, no; not partisan things. We're talking stuff that relates to the work we do in the Assembly. Whether it's professions and occupations or, you know, it could be anything: the insurance industry, what have you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's not attendance at a PC or Liberal conference or a convention or anything like that.

MS BARRETT: No. Professional associations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All right. We'll attempt to do that. The second item from that letter was: "Long term disability coverage for benefits for Constituency staff."

MS BARRETT: This is the same old problem with West Yellowhead which we have not been able to resolve through the administration. Not that they're being onerous, but our rules, I guess, are relatively restricted.

What's happened is that Jerry Doyle's assistant was diagnosed with I can't remember what kind of cancer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me half a moment. Is this . . .

MS BARRETT: Oh, it's public domain.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's public. Okay; thank you. Just on behalf of that person, that's all.

MS BARRETT: Yeah. Anyway, Jerry wanted to look after the guy, so he had to replace him. Because the guy was relatively new on staff, I understand, it is Jerry's constituency budget that has to pick up the cost for his LTDI. Have I got that wrong already? I know that he's spending \$230-odd a month to make some sort of coverage for his CA while he's under treatment and in hospital. Constituency assistant is what I mean by CA. On top of that, of course, he's had to pay for a replacement CA, and I guess that really adds up.

Coming here, we did talk about it quite a long time ago and agreed that we should try to find some sort of solution to this type of problem in the event that it happens to other MLAs, so that they're not hamstrung with their budgets. Again I don't come with a specific proposal, but I saw David, the Clerk, indicating that he could clarify something that I might have gotten a bit wrong.

DR. McNEIL: Just that the constituency office contract provides for the option of general illness leave and long-term disability coverage. Depending on how long the employee has been working, the general illness leave provides up to 80 days of pay at some combination of full and 70 percent pay. At the end of 80 days the long-term disability coverage will kick in, and then there's no cost other than the insurance costs for the employer of that coverage. It's likely in the general illness area where the constituency office is incurring costs, because those come directly out of the member's budget.

MS BARRETT: Absolutely.

DR. McNEIL: But again, at the present time that's an option the member has when the individual is hired: whether or not to extend that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So what happened in this case is that the individuals concerned did not elect to take the LTD?

DR. McNEIL: No. My understanding is that the member chose to provide the general illness leave and the LTDI to the individual. In the period of general illness leave the pay to that individual, whether at 100 percent or 70 percent, would have come out of the member's constituency budget. After the 80 days it would come out of the long-term disability program, assuming that the insurance company qualified that person for LTDI.

MS BARRETT: Right. But you can't get insurance coverage from the minute the person walks onto the job, can you? That's not a real option, is it?

DR. McNEIL: They earn this coverage as a function of the number of days and months they work, you see.

MS BARRETT: Right. Okay. So what I'm really asking -- and again I don't come with a prewritten agenda -- is: could a remedy for this kind of problem be brought to us for consideration?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think the request can be made to staff to go back, because really you're going to have to deal with the insurer.

DR. McNEIL: Oh, yeah. On the general illness leave it's just the same kind of provision that applies to your caucus employees, that

applies to the Legislative Assembly Office employees. It's a leave program.

MS BARRETT: What you're really saying is that nothing can be done?

DR. McNEIL: No, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that I think we'd have to think about what alternatives there might be. Once the employer is committed to providing this benefit, it's a question of: you're saying you're going to insure this person; you can't get out of it; where are you going to get the other funds, then, to cover that?

MS BARRETT: That's right. I mean, I don't think it happens very often, this kind of problem where somebody comes on the job and within a few weeks is diagnosed with a really serious disease that's going to take months and months to treat. I don't think it happens very often, but I sure think it's the sort of thing that we need to anticipate for some alternative form of coverage so that the constituency office can continue to function. You know, what do you do? Do you cut somebody loose just because they got diagnosed with a serious disease and tell them to go and live on welfare, or do you try to look after that person and maintain your constituency office open? I mean, that's what it really comes down to. The net result is that an MLA may have stretched their funds to the point where they can't even do an MLA report in an entire year because of trying to accommodate the human needs here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Calgary-Foothills, and then Edmonton-Whitemud.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, these situations are always very difficult, because when there's an actual case at hand is when the system, we feel, maybe isn't working at the best advantage. But normal coverage on this is 16 weeks of coverage under present employer and then the LTD kicking in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me a moment. We might as well wait so that your comments are going to be heard.

MRS. BLACK: I guess what I'm saying is that when you're dealing with an overall benefit package, cost is a very important factor. I think in my previous life in setting up benefit packages, to have an LTD plan that kicked in on day one of illness is highly unusual because of the cost factor involved in it. Normally the employee bears the costs of the LTD plan and for good reason, in that if they have to receive the benefit, it's not taxable because they've paid for it themselves. It's not a taxable benefit; it was received by the employer. If you were looking at making a change, you could be shifting a tremendous burden on our employees to pick up the costs of that extended insurance plan, which would be very difficult.

Now, certainly there could be options available to constituency offices by extended health coverage and leave of absence and disruption of work pattern insurance, which is available, but it is extremely costly for a body such as this to have available. Individuals can buy it if they're self-employed, but again it's very, very costly, so I would caution us moving too far in that direction.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Whitemud.

11:14

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would move that this matter be referred to the administration to report and bring back a recommendation for appropriate action.

Speaking to the referral very briefly, I sympathize with the comments being made. There are those situations that do occur, and there are the human values that have to be balanced against the economic values. It's very, very difficult to try and address both when you're dealing with a very limited budget like the constituency offices have. If it was a staff within the normal provincial employ, I don't think it would be that much of a problem because the amounts of money would be very, very small in terms of the overall budget, but in this particular case it could have a substantial bite. So I'd like to see some attempt made to address it and have some specific recommendation in front of us to deal with this present matter and if it reoccurs in the future.

MS BARRETT: Great. I think that's good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. A motion to refer. Those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

MS BARRETT: Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Item 5(a): 1992-93 Budget Estimates. You have binders before you. I suppose "estimates" is a word that should be underlined there. It's estimates, and we will determine in the course of our meetings in the next number of days or, goodness knows, the next couple of months as to what are the actual figures that go in here. I just point that out, so that if anybody else wants to write any story or do a newsletter on it, until such time as they're approved by the committee, they are indeed just estimates.

MS BARRETT: Didn't we just get these books yesterday?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No; I understand they were available Monday.

MS BARRETT: Oh, really? I didn't see them until yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Tuesday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right.

Mr. Clerk, if you'd like to start leading us through, please.

DR. McNEIL: Just a number of comments as far as an overview is concerned.

The budget as we present it is a maintenance budget, and it projects an overall .9 percent increase to maintain the existing level of services. The only item we're proposing which would go beyond a maintenance level is a B budget request for funds for the development of an automated library system, which has been discussed with the committee over the past year and which we'll discuss in more detail when we discuss the library and EDP budget.

Before discussing some of the assumptions on which the budget proposal is based, I wanted to just review briefly a couple of changes which have taken place in the Legislative Assembly Office in the past year. As you know, as a result of unforeseen circumstances we had to manage during the spring session with only one Parliamentary Counsel. We came to the conclusion quite quickly during the session that we were unable to handle the workload during that period with one counsel, so in the late summer, early fall we hired another individual as Parliamentary Counsel who reports to Michael Ritter, the senior Parliamentary Counsel. Some of you have met and worked with Frank Work, our new Parliamentary Counsel.

Another change that we implemented this past year was the transfer of a number of functions from the House services area to *Hansard*. We transferred the subscription and scrolls clerk there as well as the budget funds for the printing of all the other House documents like the Orders of the Day and so on. I'm just reading from something that I've prepared for myself, not for the committee.

The final organizational change to highlight was the change in the reporting relationship of the director of administration now to Blake McDougall, the ADM Legislature Librarian. Blake has also been appointed chief financial officer. The purpose of that is to give greater recognition to his ADM role which he's carried out over the past four years. We felt it appropriate that he should have increased responsibility in terms of the financial management area because he's had fairly heavy involvement in that in the past four years.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Blake, I don't know why you shifted back there. Did you like the atmosphere back there more? You should come up beside us.

DR. McNEIL: You're all aware that our former director of administration, Kathy Bruce-Kavanagh, left in the middle of November. That presented us with a situation where we had to rely for the most part on Jackie Breault, the administrative assistant to the director, to put the budget package together. She's worked very diligently to do so, and I just wanted to recognize her contribution in this process over the past number of months. She hadn't been involved in it before, so it was quite a learning experience for her during that period.

Just some highlights here before we get into the overview of each section.

For those of you who haven't met Scott Ellis, our new director of administration . . . Could you stand up, Scott? Scott comes to us most recently from Byers Transport, where he was the controller for the past -- what, Scott? -- five or six years?

MR. ELLIS: Yes, that's correct.

DR. McNEIL: So he brings a lot of expertise to bear on the administration area in the Legislative Assembly.

MR. KOWALSKI: Dealing with us would be like dealing with teamsters, I guess.

DR. McNEIL: In terms of some of the assumptions on which the budget is based, for salaries, wages, and contract payments we've assumed no increases in 1992-93 for management salaries. The salaries that are in here now reflect the salaries as they were adjusted as of June 1991. For nonmanagement salaries the only increases that are included there are those that would be provided under existing contractual agreements, union agreements, and opted-out and excluded agreements. Any questions on that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think you'd just go all the way through on all of them.

DR. McNEIL: Okay.

Employer Contributions reflect no changes in benefit costs, including increases in Alberta health care, Blue Cross, and dental plan rates. These estimates do not yet reflect the anticipated increase in the unemployment insurance rate. We know that there's one coming, but we haven't been advised specifically what it's going to be, so as yet these estimates do not reflect that UIC increase.

In the supplies, services, and fixed assets area we've applied for the most part a reduction of 25 percent in travel and in hosting. As

well, there are some savings we've realized in terms of lower printing costs and lower costs of EDP services.

The MLA Administration budget we'll get into in more detail. It's a maintenance budget except for an increase in the communications allowance relating to the increase in the first-class postage rate from 40 to 42 cents. We're proposing that the factor that determines the communications allowance be increased from 88 cents to 92 cents to reflect that postage rate increase. There are certain costs to members' benefits in there as well.

For the caucus budgets, at least in the first approximation, we've assumed no increases in terms of how the budget is presented. So the figures there are the figures for what those budgets were last year.

The other point to note is that in the overall budget for the Legislative Assembly Office, the A and B budgets, we're projecting a 1.5 percent increase.

We have a budget submission, which we just received late yesterday afternoon in detail, for the Electoral Boundaries Commission which projects an 8.8 percent increase in their budget request from last year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. That's the general.

DR. McNEIL: That's the general.

11:24

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you flip on to the Estimates Summary, the very first page gives you the overview, as you've no doubt ferreted out. Then we'd move on to General Administration. So we can go through the initial sections.

Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Is it appropriate to ask a couple of questions at this time on a global basis? No? Okay. You prefer to go through the whole . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: As long as it is global, because as you know, our process is to take each of these general sections, go through. It's got the summary page; it gives you what's happening in each section.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Well, it's global. It's general in the sense that when it came to determining the projected budgets for caucus, for constituency offices, was there input provided by the various chiefs of staff this year as in the past? Who came out with the figures?

DR. McNEIL: Well, in terms of caucus budgets, the only assumption was -- in the past the caucuses have presented budgets when we get into any proposals for changes to their budgets in this meeting. We're not proposing that caucus budgets be this; all we're saying is the figure that is there is what was budgeted last year. The administration isn't saying this is what caucus budgets should be. All we're saying is that this is what they were last year. It's up to the individual caucuses and this committee to determine whether that's the case or not.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm not disagreeing. I think certainly this is the time to show restraint, and there should be those types of freezes. I'm just wondering, though, if this was a recommendation. What it is is not a recommendation. It's simply repeating what last year's budget was, and you're leaving it up to the committee to determine.

DR. McNEIL: We have never provided input to the caucus budgets. It's entirely up to the caucuses and the members of this committee to determine those budgets.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, that's the process. We wait till we hear from you.

Cypress-Redcliff, on the global.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, the Clerk made a comment about 25 percent reduction in travel. Is he talking internal travel in the province back and forth to the capital, travel to conferences, or a combination of both?

DR. McNEIL: I should have been more explicit. It's travel that is discretionary, conferences and things like that where we have some degree of control. In terms of MLA travel between the constituency and Edmonton and travel within the constituency, we have not changed those figures. Again, those are figures in the MLA administration budget that are really the prerogative of the members to determine what those levels should be.

MR. HYLAND: Those are figures that instead of budgeting everything in the last three years, we've used actuals.

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. HYLAND: So we're a little closer to what's actually been done versus what could be done.

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other general comments before we go to this first section?

I asked someone to just come and visit with us briefly. In case all of you haven't met him, Mr. Ritter, would you like to introduce your colleague who's now standing beside you?

MR. RITTER: He'll be known as the better looking Parliamentary Counsel.

MR. CHAIRMAN: True.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. RITTER: Thank you.

This is Frank Work. He comes from a very diverse background actually. He's a Calgarian. Frank has worked in Hamilton, Bermuda, and Mauritius. He's worked for the World Bank in Washington, D.C. He was stationed in various places around the world. As I said, in Bermuda he worked for the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. He worked at the AG's department and had a lot of interaction with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, and he seems to have a real aptitude for this place. And his sense of humour is a little off-beat.

AN HON. MEMBER: Well, that'll be a nice change. [laughter]

MR. RITTER: Mr. Chairman, I'm being abused now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, on that happy note, welcome, Frank. You're free to escape, but the other one has to stay.

MR. WORK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've met some of you already, and I look forward to meeting more of you in the future.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

All right, Mr. Clerk, let's go with General Administration. I think perhaps you might be able to make some fairly good time.

DR. McNEIL: The general administration budget is projected to decrease by 5.3 percent. This is primarily due to the transfer of the position I mentioned earlier, the subscriptions and scrolls clerk, to *Hansard*. It was a desire to centralize all those operations in one place.

I don't know how you want to go through this. We've reduced, as I said, the salaries, wages, and benefits by 5.7 percent. Supplies and Services goes up by 1.9 percent. There's a 25 percent reduction in travel. That 160 percent increase in Telephone and Communications, from \$500 to \$1,300, reflects the fact that we had a new telephone system installed last spring. We're in a better position now to track exactly which areas are using the phones for long-distance charges. In the past it all came to one number, and they were arbitrarily allocated to the different areas in the Legislative Assembly Office. Now we know which particular branch is incurring the calls and can do a better allocation of those funds. So we're not really increasing our telephone costs overall, but in this area we realized from our data that we were spending more than we had budgeted in the past.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Member for Barrhead.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I move that we accept the submission, item 1, General Administration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MRS. BLACK: Agreed. Question.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried unanimously.
Section 2, MLA Administration.

DR. McNEIL: We've had some difficulties in the past when discussing this budget as to what happens with the Constituency Office Allowance, so we've prepared this first chart here which calculates the various components of the members' services allowance, the Constituency Office Allowance and the Communication Allowance, using that factor of 92 cents as opposed to 88 cents which it is now, and the Promotional Allowance, which gives us a budget of \$4,387,808. Then we've allocated that among these various components of the budget.

As we go through the budget, you'll understand that when we have a little star beside the item, that item comes from that overall members' services allowance or one of those components and it's allocated in those areas. So even though we've reallocated some of the funds within this overall allowance this year, the only increase relates to the increase in postage that we've factored in here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. There's your crib sheet to help you through this. General section, MLA Administration.
Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, how many constituencies do we now have with constituency offices? I know, for example, there are some that have got more than one. How many members have constituency offices?

DR. McNEIL: It's 78, I believe, but there are some that have four, some that have . . .

MR. HYLAND: I was looking for the number of members that actually have one or more.

DR. McNEIL: I believe it's 78.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
All right; the overview, please.

11:34

DR. McNEIL: Okay. This overall budget projects a 1.2 percent increase. Under salaries, wages, and benefits you've got a 19 percent increase, but all that is really is a movement of funds from the Constituency Office Allowance from contract to salaries, wages, and benefits. In other words, more members are employing people on contracts of employment as opposed to fee-for-service contracts.

MRS. MIROSH: You mean full-time?

DR. McNEIL: Not necessarily full-time, but there are quite a number of part-time casual employment contracts.

MR. HYLAND: But even though that would show as an increase, when it gets further into the book and the whole realm of things it doesn't show as an increase because it's a movement.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. It would show an increase under manpower, it would show a decrease under Supplies and Services, but the net would be zero.

MR. HYLAND: Yeah, because there you've got 3 percent.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And the last paragraph in there?

DR. McNEIL: The .8 percent increase in payments to MLAs is due to an increase in benefit costs: health care, Blue Cross, dental premiums, extended health care, and so on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So it's really an increase in payment.

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Are there questions in there? Then are we in a . . . Take the next page?

DR. McNEIL: Any questions on page 1? That's the general.
Page 2. Again, this is more specific in terms of . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Does that seem to . . . It's one good thing about the ability of the staff in these last few years in the preparation of the documents. It makes it certainly a lot easier to read than what it was about six years ago.

MRS. MIROSH: It's because you're hiring better people.

MR. HYLAND: Or else we understand it more.

MRS. MIROSH: Or we understand it more, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is the pleasure of the committee? Is there a motion, or are there questions in that section?

MR. BOGLE: Well, why don't we go through the section?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just testing the waters here.

DR. McNEIL: Page 3. Again, that's a reallocation based on the actual pattern of expenditure of the allowances.

Page 4 is just a reflection of that reallocation of funds and the members' decisions as to what benefits they will provide under those employment contracts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There would be one slight change on page 4, wouldn't there, in light of the motion that was passed, the Members' Services order about the dental thing? There'd be a slight change there in the dental plan?

DR. McNEIL: No, this is for staff.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Sorry about that.

DR. McNEIL: Page 5.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Page 5, subsection 2, the MLA Administration section.

DR. McNEIL: We're projecting a reduction here overall. We've reduced the MLA spousal/guest travel estimate from \$52,500 to \$25,000 to reflect actual usage of those funds.

MRS. MIROSH: Do you expect gas to go down? Gasoline?

DR. McNEIL: If you look at the line below there, you've got the same total. You add \$260,000 and the \$40,000. We've just broken out the taxi, parking, and car rentals that were previously included under the gas credit card.

MR. KOWALSKI: Can I ask a question with respect to the MLAs' Mileage Program? When I look back over 1991, I can only see that my colleagues spend more and more time in Edmonton than ever before. I don't know what the actual is; I don't know what the experience is from individuals. Is this still a fair allocation for our colleagues, as MLAs? It seems to me that when you count the number of days they were all expected to spend in Edmonton, traveling back and forth, it certainly seemed to be higher than in previous years. But as a minister I don't come under that one, so I just wanted to make sure it is fair for the MLAs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't know who can answer that one. Administration?

DR. McNEIL: This is based on the actual. It follows from the calculation of what it costs to travel under the Members' Services order that gives urban members 25,000 kilometres and rural members 60,000 kilometres. So that's the basis on which this is calculated, plus the 52 trips.

MR. KOWALSKI: Perhaps Bob and Alan would be in a better position, because I would think Dr. Elliott, for time, would use air, and Mrs. Mirosch and Mrs. Black and yourself, Mr. Chairman, could use air as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In my own case I'm finding that I'm using the car far more than using air travel. That way it saves money for the Assembly and ourselves in that sense.

MR. BOGLE: That's true. It's cheaper to use your automobile than it is to use a combination of the automobile and flying, plus you have the convenience of leaving when you wish to leave and having the vehicle here rather than using taxis. In terms of usage, I went back over the last couple of years to look at my own usage, and that was as a result of a story which lumped together travel for members of the Assembly. In one of those two years I can recall I think it was 41 round-trips between the constituency and Edmonton.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Taber-Warner on that same point?

MR. BOGLE: No, I'm on a separate point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Grande Prairie, the same point?

DR. ELLIOTT: I was on the point that Bob was on.

I think different MLAs will have a different answer to the question, because some of us have access to airports. Like, the Grande Prairie setup is a good mix, but I do find that it seems I'm packing more stuff back and forth. Sometimes it's more convenient to use the car. Also, with respect to the spouse travel, there are occasions when if my wife wishes to be in Edmonton or if I wish to have her in Edmonton, it's convenient to bring the car. Thus it will reflect in that other column up there, too, on the number of times we use spouse travel, because we don't use the number a lot of times for spouse travel. So that's an observation, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Taber-Warner, then Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. BOGLE: On a different point?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MR. HYLAND: No, I'm on the same point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, on the same point. Okay; Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I wonder about the zero percent increase in the airline credit card the way the airline charges are going, especially the short-haul ones, as the Member for Taber-Warner said. I think the ticket now from Medicine Hat to Edmonton is somewhat in excess of \$450 or \$460. You can fly halfway across Canada or to Europe almost for those estimates. Again, maybe it's time to approach companies again to try and deal, because we're talking \$310,000, probably half of that between Calgary and Edmonton. I'm just taking a straight guess, but that's a fair chunk of change to be dealing with in bulk numbers.

DR. McNEIL: We take advantage of bulk ticket buying when we can get it, but I guess the most we've ever obtained that way is about a 20 percent reduction. That's not a bad reduction.

MR. CHAIRMAN: My understanding is that we keep after it each year, so we keep trying.

Okay. Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: My point is on the MLA Former Members' Travel. There was some concern expressed late this summer about former members' travel, and I think one member of the committee, who I

don't think is here today, made some comment that he wanted the matter reviewed. In that member's absence, Mr. Chairman, could you give us a brief summary of the usage of the program by former members?

11:44

MR. CHAIRMAN: The former members who have used the program from April 1, '91, up to our latest figures, which were as of yesterday, are 22 members, and the actual cost to date on kilometres has been \$6,524. On the per diems it's been \$9,000. So the total for the current fiscal year as of yesterday is \$15,524. You could compare that to this projected, budgeted figure of \$25,000.

DR. McNEIL: You usually have a fair number of former members coming up to the opening; that's where former members attend.

MR. BOGLE: What guidelines do we apply to the usage of that service, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, my interpretation of the guidelines, as sort of given in such a general way by this committee, was, number one, to enable former members to come back to Edmonton so that they might attend various functions of the Legislature generally and special events which might occur, such as when we had the Governor General attend upon the Legislature. It certainly is legitimate for them to come to such things as openings or budget night or to come up and have consultations with former members of any of the three caucuses. It's interpreted along that line.

Again, as I look at this list, I think in terms of the number of them who then drop in through the open door policy of the Speaker's office just for visits. I know it sounds pretty hokey, but it's really heartwarming. Some of the people in particular who have come back -- whether it be someone like Isidore Goresky, who is the last surviving member of the United Farmers of Alberta government, and plenty of them from the Social Credit governments. Also, I think the most recent example was the great thing that we could have the former Lieutenant Governor Grant MacEwan come back and participate in the carol service when we did the lighting ceremony here at the Legislature. He was absolutely overwhelmed and thrilled because there were these -- what? -- 5,000, 6,000 people around the Legislature, and a good number of them were there in the Chamber. In his comments to me he said that he just couldn't believe that kind of thing was happening, and he was so appreciative about being able to have the freedom to come back, and he's living on a fairly limited income.

Those are just but examples. Really, I think it's one of those supportive programs. We've mentioned before that MLAs very seldom get a thank you while they're here, and they sure don't get any thank you after they're gone. I don't see any violation of anything that's occurring here; these people have come back for legitimate reasons. For many of them it's a healing of the memories, because some of them went out of here sort of battle-scarred, I think. Again, when they come back, it just seems to be very, very positive, and when you look at the actual figures, I don't think that's any misuse of public, taxpayer funds.

All right, page 6.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, I earlier asked for some information relating to our communications, and we won't have that information until Monday.

DR. McNEIL: We might have it tomorrow.

MR. BOGLE: We might have it tomorrow?

DR. McNEIL: Well, I think we'll have it tomorrow.

MR. BOGLE: I just want to ensure that we don't inadvertently pass the appropriate place. You will advise us?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. BOGLE: All right. Thank you.

DR. McNEIL: Advertising: again, a reallocation. It just reflects that there's more money being spent by members out of their constituency allowances for advertising meetings and so on.

MRS. MIROSH: Does that include mailing?

DR. McNEIL: No.

Page 7. [interjection] Sorry; page 6.

DR. ELLIOTT: MLA Telephone Directory Advertising: I'm drawing a blank on that. What is telephone directory advertising?

DR. McNEIL: That's what we pay out of central funds for the listing of the members' telephones in various phone books around the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yellow pages . . .

DR. McNEIL: Yellow pages and white pages and so on.

MR. HYLAND: With a heavy bold print instead of the regular?

MS BARRETT: They charge the business rate anyway even if you don't go for bold.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All righty. Page 7.

DR. McNEIL: Page 7. The first item there is the item which would be impacted by any change in the postage policy. Based on the increase in the first-class postage rate and the projected usage for this year, we project the postage budget to be \$300,000. Now, that's the number on page 7 that would be impacted by any change in the postage policy.

MR. HYLAND: Could you break out of that a rough estimate of what the increase in postal rates is versus the projected increase you've used on usage, or is that too detailed for this time?

DR. McNEIL: I would think our actual for this year would probably be about \$260,000 to \$270,000. I would say half of that would be related to postal rate. From \$260,000 to \$300,000 would be postage, and the other half would be increased usage. That's a ballpark estimate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Now we'll go to page 8.

DR. McNEIL: Again, page 8 represents reallocation of funds, or at least in the first portion of it. The second one is the rental that the administration office pays for the various photocopiers in constituency offices.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Page 9.

MR. HYLAND: MLA Constituency Offices Mobile Rental: what's that, their mobile phones?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. The rentals are paid out of the members' constituency office allowance. The tolls are handled centrally.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Section 2, MLA Administration, John, page 9.

DR. McNEIL: Any other questions on page 9? Page 10.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Page 10, constituency.

DR. McNEIL: This is just what we pay for repairs and maintenance of equipment. I think it's very straightforward; no increase there.

Professional, Technical, and Labour: here's where you see the effect of the reallocation of the funds from contract services to manpower. Your number's down here by 45.7 percent.

11:54

MR. CHAIRMAN: Page 11, section 2. The longer, foolscap-size sheet is the one that was handed out earlier, and I don't think all of you were able to be here at the time because of other commitments. It gives you some of the transfers, reallocations that have taken place.

The Member for Barrhead.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, as I recall, the last consolidation of the statutes of the province of Alberta was done in 1980. It's done every 10 years?

MR. RITTER: That's correct, Mr. Chairman, but it's revised on a yearly basis.

MR. KOWALSKI: So when would we have a consolidation? Would there be one done for 1990? If so, who would pay for that? How would that be paid for?

MR. RITTER: Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that they're not intending to make a new consolidation until 1995. In any case, that project is headed by the Attorney General's department, and I think the expense is borne by your department.

MR. KOWALSKI: Nineteen ninety-five: forget it.

MS BARRETT: Are we going to talk about statutes for a minute? Is it okay to do that now?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's right there: Annual Statutes, second line up.

MS BARRETT: It's on the bottom. Good. Okay. Now, the annual statutes, hardcover: what are the hardcover statutes? What do you mean?

MRS. BLACK: The hardcover books.

MS BARRETT: No, no. They're not 50 bucks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The bound copies?

MR. RITTER: The bound copies. It's just basically for each session of the Legislature. They're not revised or anything; they're not the looseleaf versions.

MS BARRETT: Gotcha. Okay.

Last year I mentioned something, and I'm going to mention it again. This budget is deficient. The one tool of the trade that we all need we have to pay for out of our constituency budgets. I think that

is absolutely nuts. We have to have statutes, for crying out loud. If you want new statutes in your constituency office and in your Legislature office, guess who's going to pay for them? Your constituency budget. I just think that's really inappropriate. I think they should be centrally assigned under this vote: one set of the statutes with revisions to date. Then every year I think I pay 60 bucks -- is it? -- for my updates. Maybe David or Blake or somebody knows what it costs.

DR. McNEIL: I thought updates was the \$21.40.

MS BARRETT: That says Interim Statutes, though.

DR. McNEIL: Those are the updates. I think that's what that means.

MS BARRETT: No; for sure it's more than that that I pay. I think it's around \$60.

I just think this is as vital to the job as pens or computers. I move that we get the figures for consideration tomorrow or Monday, to consider the figures if we were providing one copy to every MLA of the binders and the statutes with the annual revisions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. A request for information; no need to make a motion.

MS BARRETT: Sorry, David McNeil. I'm going to cause you guys a lot of work.

DR. McNEIL: It's okay. That should be fairly straightforward to provide.

MR. HYLAND: You mean one additional copy.

MS BARRETT: Yeah.

MR. HYLAND: You said one copy.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not hardcover.

MS BARRETT: When I talk about the hardcover: those big binders that they're in; you know, the alphabetically organized binders. That costs about 500 or 600 bucks, which I've paid for a couple times already. [interjection] Yeah, right. Chivers and I are sharing now. It's a big expense, and it comes out of your constituency budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's still public money on the one part or the other part.

All right, then, request for additional information: yellow-sticky a page in our binder.

Page 12. Ah, here's a controversial issue: beverage service in the MLA lounge. Goodness gracious. Mr. Clerk, how'd you like to explain this one?

MRS. BLACK: The next page?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Page 12.

DR. McNEIL: The allocation is for what we provide in the lounge behind the Chamber. We have juice, coffee.

MS BARRETT: Especially for the night sittings.

MR. HYLAND: I know it's tough, but other than one or two kinds of juice, it'd be nice to get a variation. It kind of gets a little dull.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hot chocolate, tea, coffee, water, and ice cubes.

MRS. MIROSH: Ice cubes. Well, the cost of ice cubes has definitely gone up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's staying the same as a zero.

What's the explanation of the next line down, where there's a reduction?

DR. McNEIL: The reduction is reflecting the applying of a 25 percent reduction to hosting in this area. That's going to depend on decisions made in each individual constituency office as to whether or not that is met.

MR. CHAIRMAN: David, there are a couple of puzzled looks here.

DR. McNEIL: Right. For example, if you had a town hall meeting or something you provided coffee, pop, or something like that for, then that expenditure would be charged to hosting in the constituency office.

MR. BOGLE: But we dealt with that issue. Pam brought it forward.

MRS. BLACK: We don't do that. We don't give them anything.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But it was done with the approval of this committee. So the net result is a minus 25 percent, right?

DR. McNEIL: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I wonder if we might be able to finish this section and then adjourn.

Page 13, Light and Power for Constituency Offices.

DR. McNEIL: Again, that's a reallocation.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DR. McNEIL: Materials and Supplies: again, this is an increase. [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please.

DR. McNEIL: The increase is entirely reflective of a reallocation of funds and not an increase in total funds.

MR. BOGLE: My only concern, Mr. Chairman, is that we're dealing with dollars within the members' services allowance. As David has just pointed out, there's no increase to the global figure, yet a single page like this can leave the wrong impression because it appears that there is indeed an increase. I guess I'm asking the question: if we don't need to go into this kind of detail in breaking out our members' services allowance budget, why are we doing it?

MS BARRETT: Probably because questions got asked in the past, so admin just says, "Well, we want that information."

MR. BOGLE: But I'm asking the question: why are we doing it? You know, you can break it down to the nth degree, and it creates more work for somebody out there. It's not required by any order that's been passed. Each member must live within his or her own members' services allowance. I'm just asking the question: why are we putting ourselves through this?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I agree with the thrust of the question. As Edmonton-Highlands pointed out, this has been our historical process the last five to six years, which was continued on even before then, and I agree. The important pages are at the beginning of each section, which gives us the overview as to what had to be increased because of prevailing market conditions or increases in premiums, and it gives you the global thing of a plus 1.2 percent. As you quite rightly point out, you can take a page like this so you can go off on a tangent and distort. I as Chair, and I'm certain with regard to the department, would be quite happy to look at it in a far different way.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DR. McNEIL: Just a comment. In terms of presenting it and approving it, there's no need to break the members' services allowance and the three components down. What we would have to provide to the Budget Bureau is a breakdown, but we can do that. It's just for element control purposes, and it's not going to affect how the member spends the money.

MR. BOGLE: Oh, I understand that. I'm talking about the many hours that your staff must put into this, and I'm asking why. Now, is there something we've done in the way we've passed an order creating the members' services allowance which in turn is causing Treasury to do that? If not, what can we do, then, to get Treasury off your back? When we've got, I believe, three categories under our members' services allocation and we allow transfers within that area, then why do we need to go into details such as -- I just passed one -- MLA Cards and Wrapping Paper for Promotional Allowance Program?

12:04

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's on page 11.

DR. McNEIL: We don't have to go into those details. We've done it, I think, because there was the assumption that the committee wanted this to happen.

MR. BOGLE: Maybe we should find out whether we do as a committee, because my own view is that it's causing additional time and effort and it's not necessary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The real reason is to try as a department to be prepared for every nitty-gritty little question that will come from members of the committee, who have indeed the right to ask it. So we tried to game plan it ahead of time.

MR. McINNIS: Is not the difficulty also that it results in a cheque being issued sooner or later and the cheque has to be coded as to expenditure categories? At some point it's going to be broken down in any event into an object of expenditure code.

MS BARRETT: Which is how they're able to trace it in the first place.

MR. BOGLE: I understand that, but we do have three different categories that we've approved. If you go through this, John, I think you're up to, well, I don't know how many when you come to gift wrapping and cards.

MRS. MIROSH: We might as well put down how many pencils we buy.

MR. BOGLE: The end result is that David is back requesting additional manpower from us to do the necessary operation.

MS BARRETT: I have no objections to not doing it.

MR. BOGLE: Can we take it as a general concurrence that we not do it and boil it back down?

DR. McNEIL: In terms of the members' services allowance?

MR. BOGLE: In terms of the members' services allowance, yes.

MR. McINNIS: You could summarize it all on one sheet.

MS BARRETT: Exactly.

MR. HYLAND: That might be all we need in the book.

DR. McNEIL: We can do that.

MR. BOGLE: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, then, with respect to the rest of this section, I don't think that there's anything that's terribly controversial. So when we reconvene tomorrow, we will start with section 3. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We stand adjourned until 9 in the morning in the Carillon Room.

[The committee adjourned at 12:06 p.m.]

