

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

1:10 p.m.

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon. We have a quorum.

We also have a new sound system. I think that if you listen, you'll be much more cautious about any whispers that might take place.

MS BARRETT: Can we test it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure. You can go right ahead. Whisper sweet nothings to the man beside you.

Due thanks to Public Works, Supply and Services for carrying through with that, but also to Gary Garrison and his staff: Doug Jeneroux and all the others that have been working with the system. Hopefully we will have a number of members who will be able to hear better during the spring sitting.

I have been notified that the Member for Red Deer-North will be about half an hour late for the meeting. I also have received regrets from the Member for Calgary-Foothills. That's the one I know of today. What about Calgary-Glenmore? [interjection] Oh, okay. Thank you.

All right. A couple of other things have transpired since we last met; namely, the Clerk Assistant, Karen South, has been hired, as you know, as the executive director -- chief cook, bottle washer, organizer -- for the Ethics Commissioner. Also, the Legislative Offices Committee has made the appointment with respect to the Ethics Commissioner, Mr. Clark. Good.

At our last meeting we went through a number of items, of course, with respect to the budget, and it's follow-up, tidy-up on those items which concerns most of our agenda. I hope that in your busy lives you've had a few minutes to look at the agenda to see if any items are missing or if there are any other items that you wish to bring to the attention of the committee.

Approval of the agenda? Moved by Grande Prairie. Those in favour, please signify. Thank you.

Might we, then, deal first with 3(a), the minutes of our committee meeting of January 9.

MS BARRETT: Motion to approve.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Edmonton-Highlands, the approval for the January 9 minutes. Call for the question.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

Item 3(b): Friday, January 10, '92.

MS BARRETT: Motion to approve.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A motion by Edmonton-Highlands for approval. All those in favour, please say aye or signify. Thank you. Carried unanimously.

Item 3(c): Monday, January 13.

MS BARRETT: Ditto.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A motion for approval, Edmonton-Highlands. Those in favour, please signify. Carried. Thank you.

I'm given to understand that tomorrow morning the committee on the Constitution will be having another meeting. They hope to be adjourned by 11:30. I believe it could become the will of this committee that we not meet until 11:30 here in the Chamber, if indeed we need to meet tomorrow. Would that be agreed, that we meet tomorrow at 11:30 if required?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Well, we might as well go through this item as we have it. Item 4(a), the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon's proposal with regard to parking costs for out-of-town MLAs.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Having had the opportunity to review the correspondence and talk with Mr. Taylor, the point that he's making is that there are situations where there are inequities within the system in that MLAs in Edmonton and Calgary are provided parking passes by the respective cities, yet rural MLAs do a great deal of business in Edmonton in particular. He's pointing out there is an inequity in that sense. He's asking that it be remedied.

I had anticipated a report coming from the Clerk's office on this matter, and possibly the Clerk could speak to it.

DR. McNEIL: We have had no request to prepare a report. My understanding was that the member was going to raise this item and the committee was going to give direction to the Clerk.

MR. WICKMAN: The direction I would hope for is that those members that feel there is an inequity be allowed to charge those parking fees against their constituency budget. It doesn't mean any additional costs to the administration. I'm not proposing it be charged against Members' Services but simply be charged against a constituency budget so that if a member from rural Alberta runs up \$150 in parking charges in the course of a year, that can be drawn against his or her constituency budget. I'll move that, as a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

That an MLA incurring parking costs would charge it back to their own allowance.

Speaking to the motion, the Member for Barrhead.

MR. KOWALSKI: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I'm looking at Mr. Taylor's letter of April 22, 1991, and included in the letter is this quote: "I paid 7 parking tickets in the last year that I have not included in parking costs." I think it would not be in the best interests of the prestige of the office of a Member of the Legislative Assembly, us, to endorse a request that would have the taxpayer of the province paying for parking tickets. I think that would have the wrong ring in terms of the trust that's provided to us as holders of this esteemed office, and I would certainly hope that we would not consider such a request.

The point of parking costs that might be incurred by members from outside of Edmonton, and presumably from outside of Calgary, who might visit Edmonton. Perhaps the thought would be to ask if this is a policy of the councils of both cities, to provide such a so-called "perk," if that's what it is. I don't know if that's the correct phraseology. If this is provided to certain numbers of the Members of the Legislative Assembly, would it not be in order to ask both cities to subscribe to a similar policy for all Members of the Legislative Assembly?

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you speak, hon. member, you conclude the debate on your motion, so you'll just have to wait for a moment.

Any other points with respect to the motion?

MS BARRETT: I have a question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: The mover of the motion may want to address this in his summation. I'm assuming that the request did not include paying parking tags; that is, for expired parking meters. Would that be clarified, please? Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Member for Grande Prairie.

DR. ELLIOTT: Just for the record, Mr. Chairman, the city of Grande Prairie when approached on this topic chose not to offer their MLA parking privileges.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud, if you could speak to this issue, please, concluding.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To wrap up debate, specifically I made reference to parking costs, not parking tags. I agree with the Member for Barrhead that it would be improper to pay for parking tickets out of a constituency budget.

The second point. It's my understanding, and I could be corrected if I'm wrong, the parking meters that are issued at least by the city of Edmonton, and I assume the Calgary practice is the same, are charged out at a cost of about \$800 each. Now, if Members' Services are not presently paying the city of Edmonton for those, it means that some other budget within the city of Edmonton is showing that as lost revenue. They are not given out just as a courtesy without showing up in some books. So for that reason I don't think they would extend it, because some department would end up showing a great deal more loss of revenue.

1:20

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All those in favour of the motion . . . Forgive me. I got halfway through the previous announcement about Karen South moving and of course forgot an equally important thing, which is that Louise has joined us as the Clerk Assistant.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Moved by Mr. Wickman
that charges incurred by rural members for parking in the city be charged back to their constituency allowance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? The matter is defeated.

Item 4(b). You have this in your binder: Proposal for Payment of Certain Conference Fees from Constituency Budget. It was originally raised, I believe, by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

DR. McNEIL: Item 4(b). What is being circulated is a proposed amendment to the constituency services order, which is a provision for the payment of

conference registration fees and reasonable living and travelling expenses for the Member and the Member's constituency office staff in connection with attending conferences.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Which means that it comes out of the caucus funds. Is that correct?

DR. McNEIL: No, it comes out of constituency funds.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the work that the Clerk put into this motion. In moving it, I'd like to explain that generally it is our experience that a caucus budget has only a small amount of flexibility for sponsoring things like conference attendances, and a lot of MLAs do pay for conference attendance just out of their own pockets. I mean, that's what our expense allowance is for. Some of them get really onerous in terms of cost. If you've already paid \$500 out of your pocket to get to one conference and you've got an extra hundred dollars in your constituency budget which you can use to go to another conference, it seems to me that this is a sensible approach to take. I'd be willing to see any kind of monitoring that would be recommended with respect to this usage if the motion passes. I'm not asking for anything that would result in any potential abuse, and if any monitoring were to take place and we were to be advised that there was excessive use of the authority given under this motion, I'd be the first to move to revoke it.

In the meantime, I move this motion and thank the Clerk for drafting it so well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Others wishing to speak to the motion?

The Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, is the mover of the motion in this regard -- I guess the Member for Edmonton-Highlands -- in a position to clarify or determine the phraseology she used about abuse? In the book that we have here, it talks about attendance at nonpartisan conferences. Perhaps it would help me if I understood what types of conferences certain individuals would want to attend that they are currently being prohibited from attending, if that is the correct phraseology, and how this would change the current practice of assisting various Members of the Legislative Assembly by way of the allocations that are provided to the various caucus offices.

MS BARRETT: Right.

MR. KOWALSKI: Are these conferences outside of Alberta?

MS BARRETT: No.
Shall I?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, just a moment. I have to be equally fair as what I was with the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MS BARRETT: No, I meant just to respond to the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any others wishing to comment on the whole matter?
Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: For clarification, Mr. Chairman, is there anything preventing a caucus from providing the conference fees out of the caucus budget for a member of the caucus to go to that particular conference?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Instead of coming from a constituency allowance?

DR. McNEIL: No, at the present time there is nothing other than the size of the budget to restrict payment of conference fees, but there's

no provision now in the constituency office allowance to pay for those kinds of expenses.

MR. BOGLE: Remember, we have not removed the opportunity for members to transfer up to 25 percent of the constituency budget into the caucus budget.

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right. That provision is still there. I understand some caucuses do it much more than others. Okay?

Final comments, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: I'd like to answer Ken's questions first. When I talked potential abuse, I really didn't have anything in mind. When I did talk in the last meeting about this, I did say nonpartisan conferences, so we could certainly amend this to say nonpartisan. The type of conferences that we're talking about would be -- for example, in my area housing's a big issue, so I go to a lot of conferences on housing. Anything that's put on, I go. I mean, I don't have kids; I can pay for this myself out of my expense allowance.

The ones that get really expensive are the energy conferences and some of the health care conferences. Caucus budgets are primarily relatively fixed in terms of the component that goes out to staff, you see, and when you have on top of that certain capital acquisition, whether it's a new fax machine or what have you, you're down to a pretty small budget that can be flexible. It is true; I believe all caucuses probably do sponsor MLAs to go to some conferences, especially the more expensive ones.

With respect to Bob's comment, I'd forgotten about the 25 percent, and you're absolutely right. However, my sense is that that's too circuitous and this is a more up-front approach. You're right; the constituency transfer to caucus would work so that a caucus could pay for it, but it seems to me that we should be more up front. So I'd like to stick to the motion and still support it and ask for people's support.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Then the understanding is that as this is processed through the Legislative Assembly -- records payment and so forth -- we'll be able to start to get a handle on who's spending what on what if the motion is successful.

We have the motion before us. Those in favour, please signify. Opposed, please signify. Sorry; the matter fails.

Item 4(c): Proposal on Long-term Disability Coverage for Constituency Office Staff. Clerk, please.

DR. McNEIL: Cheryl Scarlett, our personnel director, has done a fairly in-depth analysis of this situation and has a report for you. She'll take you through it, and I'll hand it out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

1:30

MRS. SCARLETT: In terms of addressing the issue, what I would like to do is just follow the outline that I've prepared. As I understand, there was a concern raised at the last meeting with respect to primarily the financial impact of offering long-term disability insurance to your constituency office staff. We have taken a look at that and would propose a couple of alternatives, but before we get to that, I'd like to go through the purpose and some other information that may assist you in making a decision.

Basically, the long-term disability plan is designed to provide continuance of partial income to an employee who becomes mentally or physically disabled. The disability benefit is at 70

percent of the annual salary of the employee. Right now if you as a member have offered this benefit to your employee, the LTDI premiums are paid in full by you, the member, at a rate of .5 percent of the employee's earnings. In reality, in order to receive the long-term disability benefits, the member also has to offer and approve general illness coverage to the employee, and as such the member would be responsible for maintaining paid leave to your employee for the duration of the 80 days. Now, the general illness benefit is the one that becomes very costly, particularly if you have to hire a replacement person during this 80-day period. It's only after the general illness 80 days run out, then, that the long-term disability coverage would kick in. Now, as a member you're not responsible for maintaining the employee's salary on long-term disability, but you are responsible for continuing to pay the employer contributions in addition to both the employee and employer contributions if you've also offered a pension benefit.

On page 2 of the outline I've given an example of typical costs of contributions that you would be looking at maintaining if your employee was on long-term disability. I think the important one to note here is the employer responsibility for pension, which represents again both the employee and the employer shares. So you can see that the costs on a monthly basis to your constituency allowance could be significant if the employee first goes on general illness and then on long-term disability. The issues, then, I see are two-part: number one, the costs of carrying the employee at full pay while they're on general illness for the 80 days; and then secondly, the lesser costs of maintaining the employer contributions while the employee is on long-term disability.

Other information of interest. A long-term disability plan was not initially intended for employees on shorter term contracts. Presently we have only 28 constituency employment contracts offering general illness and long-term disability. As well, we presently only have 20 employment contracts offering the pension benefit. So again, it's important to refer to the financial impact of the pension on long-term disability. Presently only one employee is receiving LTDI benefits. His contract expires March 31, 1992. LTDI ends on the termination of the contract.

Since the introduction of the benefits option on the employment contract through constituency office staff the most popular options approved by members have been the standard Alberta health care, Blue Cross, group life insurance, and dental coverage. In addition, please remember that the contracts also offer a mandatory 10-day, short-term illness leave provision for your employee, so there is some short-term sick leave there already. The less popular options, then, have been: the general illness, because they're very costly if used; LTDI, again costly if used; pension, very costly -- you as a member contribute 4.375 percent of the employee's earnings towards pension; and special leave, which is not costly but rarely offered, and that would offer to your employee an occasional day or two of paid leave for such things as bereavement and those kinds of things.

Page 3 talks about three alternatives to consider. Alternative A would be to suggest that we work at increasing the members' awareness of the benefits that they're offering and the costs or consequences of such, again with emphasis on general illness, long-term disability, and pension. Option B would propose considering either changing and/or eliminating general illness or long-term disability benefit coverage for our constituency office employees. Option C would propose having members that are presently offering LTDI to their employees being responsible for contributing additional monthly premiums as a contingency fund, in terms of a self-funding situation, to cover any costs of LTDI benefits when the employee needs to take advantage of them. These top-up premiums would be reviewed yearly and would be set based upon the actual costs of premiums paid in the previous year. If we went with that

based upon last year's benefit costs, the top-up premium would be \$12.15 per month for each of the 28 employment contracts. So those 28 members that offered LTDI would be responsible, out of their constituency offices, for paying an additional \$12.15 per month for those employees.

Now, these alternatives address the initial concern with respect to the LTDI costs; however, they don't really address the larger cost item to members, and that's the paid 80-day general illness leave.

In terms of a recommendation, recognizing that our constituency employment contracts are shorter term contracts and that the constituency allowance is limited, it's suggested that the members concentrate on offering basic health benefits to their employees, those being Alberta health care, Blue Cross, group life insurance, and dental. It's also recommended that members review with personnel services the value of offering a pension benefit to your employee, because depending on the cost and each employee's different situation, whether they're working full-time and how long they anticipate being in the system, it may not be good value for your dollars. It's also recommended that the 80-day general illness paid leave benefit be reduced to something less than 80 days and that also long-term disability benefit coverage be eliminated. Now, it's important to note that if the general illness benefit is reduced, LTDI cannot be offered.

The other minor recommendation is that members should be encouraged to consider offering the special leave benefit more than it is presently.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Now we can go through some questions and answers if you wish. That way we're not limited to speaking once to the matter, but once a motion does come in place, that's when we limit ourselves in terms of the speaking once to a matter.

So, Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Cheryl, thank you for the report. It's very clear, concise. I just don't understand what special leave is all about. Is that the idea that you sort of make it up on the spot; when a crisis happens, you grant leave on an ad hoc basis? Is that what's meant by the special leave benefit?

MRS. SCARLETT: Special leave in the employment contract for constituency office employees refers to "an Employee who requires time off from work may be granted special leave at his regular salary upon approval by the Member" as follows: in the case of an illness, up to a maximum of two working days; in the case of the death of the employee's spouse, common-law spouse, or the mother, father, a maximum of three working days; travel in the case of both general illness and bereavement, again up to small maximum amounts; time off for an executor, up to a maximum of two days; in the case of a flood, fire, or other disaster, up to a maximum of two days; attending a funeral as a pallbearer, a maximum of one; attending adoption proceedings or being present for the birth of a child; in the case of an employee attending a formal hearing to become a Canadian citizen, a maximum of one day.

MR. McINNIS: So it doesn't really cover illness. Well, it covers other events like that, but I mean the employee's own illness doesn't seem to be.

1:40

MRS. SCARLETT: Correct. It does not. But under benefit 7(a), which is an entitlement, not an option, under sick leave,

"Full time employees" shall be entitled to 10 full days paid sick leave per year. Paid sick leave may be subject to proof of illness on return to work.

MR. McINNIS: One other question. Why does the LTDI terminate when the contract terminates? Most of us operate on a yearly contract as a convenient time to review employment terms and conditions, but in fact the employment relationship usually carries on year after year during the time a member is in service in any event. I know you can't sign a contract of any sort that goes beyond the life of the Legislative Assembly. Is there a rule in the LTDI program that when the current contract expires, that's it and the employee is terminated? Is that basically what happens under the existing LTDI?

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes. Basically, the LTDI was never intended for contracts, and we're talking about shorter term contracts. When the employee's contract expires, then you as an employer should not also be responsible for continuing paying those benefits for years and years after. There are regulations that indicate that upon termination of the contract, the benefit also ceases.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Additional questions?

MS BARRETT: This is not a question; it's a comment. I'd like to suggest that we bring this back to our caucus, which is the one that originated it, to see if they want to take any further action.

If I could, thank you very much for all the work. I know this was not an easy task.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We'll take that as advice for the purposes of our minutes. Indeed, I'm sure the document as prepared will be circulated in each caucus for each MLA to . . . You know, perhaps we can have the recommendation through each caucus that each MLA have a look at it to see that they're not confused about what is really offered in terms of contract.

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, there's a second portion of the document Cheryl circulated that's related to the caucus offices. I would suggest that we not deal with that at this time but members review that as well in relation to the issue as it applies to caucus employees. When it comes back to the meeting, it can be discussed at that time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, there's a good outline of the benefits -- disability benefits, travel benefits, and stuff like that -- on the record of Leg. Offices about two or three meetings ago. I forget the exact date. Do you remember, Bob? We had Mr. Heise -- is that his name? -- come and speak to us about those benefits. It would be a good outline for members to read to see what we have, and then that could be compared with the information we have here to make a good outline of what's there.

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

MR. McINNIS: Is it fair to say that these recommendations are addressed to individual members and caucuses rather than to the committee in terms of policy? It's not clear on some of them. For example, the question of reducing the general illness provision to something less than 80 days: whether that's something we can do

individually with our staff or as caucuses or it's something that would have to be changed at the level of policy.

DR. McNEIL: I would say that would be something you'd want to consider as a matter of policy as it would apply to all staff. Those constituency office contracts and their structure were approved by this committee. While they do allow some variation, the alternative of taking long-term disability is a standard one in the contract.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Having glanced at this quickly, hon. members, I think one thing that might be here: we have this document sent back to the Table and by tomorrow have it reprocessed so that, for example, on page 4 where it says "recommendations," we just say "items for consideration" and change this business of it as recommended, recommended, recommended. Just say "it should be considered" -- "consideration should be given to" -- otherwise we're going to be confusing individual members in each caucus plus the caucus staff. That's something that can be done within the next 12 hours, I'm sure, or 24 hours anyway.

Along that line, Robert, would you pick them up and bring them back, and, Cheryl, would you be good enough to do that so we can have them, please? Thank you.

Was there a copy on Mr. Kowalski's desk?

Okay. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen and staff -- who, of course, are also ladies and gentlemen.

Item 4(d), 1992-93 Budget Estimates. Of course, a number of these are items for additional information from our previous meetings.

Now, if you also have with you your budget books: Section 2 -- MLA Administration. The first item here, of course, is Freight and Postage. Members of the subcommittee were going to be dealing with that. Does any member wish to speak? The Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, members will recall that we looked at a formula which would have used the ND caucus as a base of 100 points and would have seen the Liberal caucus, which is half the size of the ND caucus, receive half the amount; and the governing caucus, which is more than twice as large as the ND caucus, would receive 25 percent above the ND caucus.

Since that time we've had a by-election in Little Bow. The seat has been retained by the government. The size of the cabinet has shrunk by one; therefore, we have one additional private member. So the essence of the motion under the caucus offices applies the principle I mentioned earlier, the formula, and then takes the amount available for one additional member of \$1,413, adds that to the amount, and we come up with a new total for the government members' caucus of \$45,213. The number for the Official Opposition caucus would be \$35,000 and the Liberal opposition caucus, \$17,500.

The other part of the motion is not affected by the by-election in Little Bow, and that was the constituency offices allocation. It's not affected because we were taking the total sum of money, \$100,200, and dividing that by the 83 constituencies and coming out with an average of \$1,207 per year per constituency office.

I'd be pleased to read the motion into the record, and then we can debate the motion if that's in order, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Legislative Assembly Freight and Postage expenditures paid from the MLA Administration budget to cover the cost of individual mailings between MLAs and their constituents from the caucus offices and from constituency offices are to be capped as follows: under the first category of caucus offices, private government members' caucus, \$45,213; Official Opposition caucus, \$35,000; Liberal opposition caucus, \$17,500.

These amounts are calculated on projected expenditures for 1992-93, using the 1991 calendar year as a basis and the basis for calculation attached. We have tables 1 and 2 attached. If any of the caucuses exceed their designated amount, they will have to pay for the additional mailings out of caucus funds, and the Legislative Assembly Office will be required to monitor expenditures on a monthly basis and provide a status report to the respective chiefs of staff.

The second part of the motion deals with constituency offices.

1:50

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wonder, Taber-Warner, if we could make that a separate motion, please. Thank you.

Speaking to the motion, I recognize Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm insulted by the motion, quite frankly. In terms of impact on one's ability to communicate with concerned Albertans, this makes it very, very difficult. The \$17,500 is probably about 25 percent of what we would anticipate as reasonable for our caucus mailings. There are so many areas Albertans want to hear about from the various caucuses: what their position may be on a Bill that's being introduced in the House, their position on matters that affect all of us: health care, education, and so on. The \$17,500 figure impacts on us the most in that we have emphasized within our caucus the responsibility to communicate. I look at the material, the policies from other provinces, and this type of structured formula that would prohibit us from freely communicating is virtually unheard of. That's got to be one of the most important aspects.

If we want to sit down and argue or discuss how budgets can be reduced, where government expenditures can be reduced, there are many, many areas. I think if we talk in terms of the global budget that affects members' services, if we talk in terms of staff and in terms of remuneration, perks, benefits, it's a tremendous amount of money, in the millions and millions of dollars, and here we focus on a particular one that does a great deal of damage for us. For some reason the other two caucuses have not chosen to place the same priority on communicating with Albertans that we have. It almost appears that the other caucuses are kind of content that if they can't keep up to the type of communication we have demonstrated in the past year, they're going to take us down to a level that I don't feel is satisfactory.

I think what we've spent in the past reflects our enthusiasm, our energy, our recognition of people wanting to hear from elected representatives. I could understand if there was some cap, if we used, for example, as a basis for a more reasonable type of formula the figures the various caucuses spent last year. I'm not saying we should continue to increase. If there's a feeling that there's a need for some type of arbitrary ceiling for budget purposes, so be it. But this one is not reasonable at all, Mr. Chairman, and I am deeply, deeply insulted by it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, I think there is a case that can be made for the Liberals' position, but I don't think it's the case that was just made. This issue was initiated because we learned that the eight members of the Liberal caucus were spending roughly the same amount of money on postage as the other 75 members of the Assembly combined, or at least those who are not members of Executive Council. It does indicate a very high use of the mail. You can read lots of things into that. You can read the fact that the Liberal Party is essentially a mailing list, especially since they've

done away with membership fees, and a junk mailing list at that. I tend to take the view that unlimited first-class mailing by members is a facet of free speech, and if you accept that principle, unfortunately one of the things you have to accept is that some parties will abuse it and will send a lot of junk mail out. I have to tell you, hon. member, that not all the stuff you send out in the mail helps you, especially in the environmental area, which I work in. When you send to environmental groups tonnes and tonnes of paper -- you know, copies of *Hansard* printed on one side -- they kind of wonder whether you've really got your head in the game as far as what we're trying to do in the environmental movement. I think the formula is fair between caucuses, but my feeling is that part of the price of accepting that there is an unlimited ability to communicate is accepting that some members from time to time will communicate excessively with material that is unwanted, unrequested. That's just the way they operate, certainly not because the other parties can't keep up.

Because I think it's a matter of principle, I'm going to oppose the motion at this time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Additional comments with respect to the motion? Thank you, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, with reluctance I think I'm going to vote for this motion. I think the cap is too low. I guess I was unable to convince some of my counterparts on the subcommittee about that. You know, in 1986 we went to a system of prorating budgets and a system of an allocation per MLA to design caucus budgets and stuff like that. So it seems to me that the principle embodied in this motion is fair.

I think the cap is too low. In that respect I agree with my colleague John. You do have to have the ability to communicate. You can make it a bit cheaper by not using first-class mail, I understand. I think the cap is too low considering the amount of money that is spent in general on mailings and because it is a very useful method of communication. I'm going to maybe lobby later on to have the cap changed, okay? Nonetheless I believe the principle embodied here is fair. By the way, I didn't think that principle was fair until it was imposed on me against my own will in 1986, but since then every time we've made budget decisions, we've done it on the basis of formula, and I don't see why formula shouldn't govern us when it comes to this cost, just like any other cost. So I repeat that I think the cap is too low, and I'm going to do my bit to lobby on that outside this meeting, but the principle is fair.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, in view of the last comments by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands in talking about the cap, I would propose that we table this motion until tomorrow so some discussion can go on between the three caucuses to see if we can come closer to an agreement.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a motion to table. Those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried. Thank you. The item comes back.

The next motion, Taber-Warner, with respect to constituency offices.

MS BARRETT: I'd like that tabled. If we're going to talk about it again, could we?

MR. BOGLE: The request is made that that matter be dealt with along with the caucus offices. I have no objection to that.

MS BARRETT: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. There's no motion before us, so the item will take general consensus unless the Chair hears violent opposition to it. So be it. Thank you. Then for purposes of notation on your agenda, item 4(d)(i)A comes back, and that's in two parts.

The next item, Provision of Statutes of Alberta to Members. The Clerk, please.

2:00

DR. McNEIL: The question here was: have we not budgeted for provision of statutes for members? The answer, I think, in summarizing this handout, is that over the past few years we've been budgeting for the update to the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1980* on a yearly basis \$50 per member. We went back to the Members' Services minutes and discovered that a decision was made in 1980 to provide members with the option of receiving either a hardcover or a loose-leaf edition of the 1980 revised statutes when they were issued. We don't have any specific records we can find that say that, yes, it was done or, no, it wasn't. My assumption was that members at that time were provided either the hardcover or loose-leaf statutes, but it appears as though a lot of members do not have one or the other at the present time.

Given that they are updated on a regular basis through the issuance of loose-leaf updates, we recommend that the office order four copies of the loose-leaf statutes using remaining 1991 funds allocated for the purchase of statutes and allocate these to the caucuses on a pro rata basis, and then early in the 1992-93 fiscal year order another four copies and allocate them to the caucuses on the same basis. The cost of the loose-leaf edition is \$820 per set, with a \$60 per year cost for updates.

I want to emphasize that I think this is a short-term solution in that we have been advised that the Legislative Counsel office will be able to provide us with the statutes and regulations as a data base sometime later this year. Then we will be in a position to put that data base on our Legislative Assembly network, and that would provide each constituency office and all the caucus offices with access to statutes electronically. I think this is a better solution than buying 83 copies of the loose-leaf statutes at the present time, which would total about \$65,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

MS BARRETT: Thank you.

To the Clerk, thanks for the comprehensive report. With respect, though, I disagree. I cannot think of \$65,000 being better spent in any fiscal year than to give every MLA a hard copy of the essential tool of the trade. Let me point out to you first of all, folks, that we don't pay for the copies of the *Gazette*, in other words the regulations. They come in, right? In fact, I don't mind paying \$60 a year for the updates. What I object to is that this is the . . . I mean, if there is one tool of the trade we all need, it is the statutes. I believe they should be issued to every MLA. When an MLA steps down and is replaced by another, those get transferred; it's a one-time-only cost. However, considering what the Clerk is recommending is at least a step in the right direction, I would say let's do it.

Finally, while I feel totally comfortable on-line, I can remember that when I was in university I wouldn't take a course because I had to learn computers. Now, in those days they didn't speak English,

and that's what scared me about computers. There are still lots of people who are afraid of computers. Are you going to tell a 60-year-old to go and take a course in DOS and WordPerfect? Forget it. You know that a lot of people aren't going to do it. They probably would never access the on-line statutes. It's okay for somebody like me or the Clerk, who live on a computer, but there are some MLAs that will never do that. I think hard copy is absolutely essential.

In any event, we're going to become government one day and that will be one of the things I'll advance as a government MLA. In the meantime, I suggest that the first step is being recommended by the Clerk. Acquiring a couple of hard copies for the caucus offices is at least a step in the right direction, and I support the recommendation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you then take up as your motion paragraph 3 of the report recommending that
the Legislative Assembly Office immediately order four copies of the looseleaf edition
for each caucus?

MS BARRETT: I'll move that. I feel passionate about this subject because I have to refer to the statutes all the time. I'm sure most other MLAs must as well. It's a constant thing, every day almost.

MR. CHAIRMAN: With the understanding, then, that the cost of this is to be billed to each caucus, to each member, or to the Legislative Assembly?

MS BARRETT: I don't know. What did you have in mind?

DR. McNEIL: These funds are presently part of the MLA Administration budget, so I would . . . The recommendation was based on the assumption that they would come from the central funds that have been allocated for the purchase of statutes for members.

MS BARRETT: When we have the money.

DR. McNEIL: When the money is there, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud, speaking to the motion as contained in the third paragraph.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A comment and then a question. I guess at times I question the priorities some of us may have here when we talk in terms of spending and what's important to the people we represent. We bounce around a figure of \$65,000 rather loosely, whereas a few seconds ago there was such concern being expressed about the overuse of postage. I tend to point out to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands: let's look at what's important to those people out there that elect us. Yes, this is important to us as individual MLAs, but in a time of restraint when we want to get priorities in order, I would not see this \$65,000 as an essential priority. So I can support what is being proposed here. I think it's a reasonable solution, a reasonable compromise, a very inexpensive compromise, so I will support it.

My question to the Clerk, Mr. Chairman, through you: when reference is made to the allocation of loose-leaf editions on a pro rata basis and considering we're dealing with a total of eight -- four and two steps -- how will those numbers be allocated? In the first four, will the Tory caucus get two, will the New Democrat caucus get one, and will we get one?

DR. McNEIL: In the first set, I would recommend that it be two, one, and one.

MR. WICKMAN: The second set?

DR. McNEIL: I would suggest the same allocation. If we can save money on the hardbound copy updates, we may be able to provide another one or two sets.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Additional to this motion?

Summation, Edmonton-Highlands, on the motion, if you wish.

MS BARRETT: No, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. There's a call for the question then. All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

Item 4(d)(i)C, Effect of Postal Increase on Members' Communication Allowance. Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, I would simply observe that the communication allowance is based primarily on the cost of first-class postage to each registered voter. I observe that Canada Post hit us again with a 2-cent increase per item as of the first of the month. I understand the budget estimates may have been amended to reflect that increase.

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, I have a draft Members' Services order to effect the change in the communications allowance portion of the constituency Members' Services allowance to implement the change caused by increase in the postal rate effective April 1, 1992.

MR. CHAIRMAN: While this is being distributed, perhaps we could adjourn until quarter past the hour.

[The committee adjourned from 2:08 p.m. to 2:20 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll come back to order. A potential Members' Services order was put in front of you with respect to the effect of postal increases.

Clerk, would you like to speak to this, please. The motion before us is Members' Services Order 2/92. It's moved by Edmonton-Jasper Place. Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: This order reflects an increase of 4 cents in the postal rate as it applies to the communications allowance in the members' constituency office budget package. It is presently 88 cents, and it's proposed to go to 92 cents.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Further discussion? Questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a call for the question. All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you, hon. members.

Item 4(d)(i)D, Wage Increase Survey and its Possible Impact on Constituency Budgets. The chiefs of staff were to report. Does that mean the Clerk has gained a synthesis and a consensus?

MS BARRETT: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, good.

Clerk, would you like to speak to that, please.

DR. McNEIL: The consensus reached was that a factor would be applied to the constituency office allowance portion of the Members'

Services allowance -- that's \$38,036 -- to reflect the projected salary and wage increases for 1992-93 for nonmanagement personnel. We looked at the average over the three caucuses of the nonmanagement salary allocations, and we projected an increase based on the known merit increases that applied to the bargaining unit, opted-out, and excluded staff as well as taking into account the known increases in benefit rates. So our recommendation is a 3.75 percent increase on the constituency office allowance, which is \$38,036.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. The recommendation for consideration is a 3.75 percent increase on the constituency allowance side. Does an hon. member wish to take up this cause in the form of a motion?

MS BARRETT: I will.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Highlands. Do you wish to speak to that motion?

MS BARRETT: I think the Clerk gave a very good explanation, and I think the Clerk and the chiefs of staff should also be thanked for working so diligently on this matter and coming to a real consensus, as I understand it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-Jasper Place, Taber-Warner.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, a question to the Clerk, if I could, through you. You reflected a figure of some \$38,000-odd as being the base for the constituency offices?

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. WICKMAN: And you said the increase would be 3 point . . .

DR. McNEIL: Three point seventy-five percent. That number would move from \$38,036 to \$39,462.

MR. WICKMAN: Right. So the 3.75 percent increase would be determined to be on that portion of the constituency budget that is wage related.

DR. McNEIL: Correct.

MR. WICKMAN: Now, what's the figure that's used for the caucus offices? What portion of the caucus budget?

DR. McNEIL: We haven't talked about that yet.

MR. WICKMAN: That figure, then, will come up under the three caucus budgets?

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Taber-Warner.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to support this modest proposal that the \$38,000 at present is intended to cover all the base operating expenses of a community office including rent, utilities, office supplies, and salaries and benefits. In the case, I think, of most urban members it doesn't go that far, and last year the committee undertook to freeze that budget amount, which I think put

on a lot of pressure. So to put in 3.75 percent, which really is for a two-year period, I think is a modest increase, and I'd like to support it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Member for Taber-Warner with respect to this motion.

MR. BOGLE: Well, I support the motion as presented for all the reasons already listed by previous speakers.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, if I'm understanding what was said rightly, are we going to find a common base for that 3.75 percent? Why I say that: each constituency office is probably staffed differently, and different percentages. Unless we find a common spot, each one is now going to be different versus the present time. If we're going to take something that's common to all, an average or something of the staffing, then I'm comfortable, but I'm not comfortable if we're on just the actual because then it will start to distort it. But if we can agree that we'll take something that's average, okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A final comment, Clerk?

DR. McNEIL: The recommended adjustment is based on an average across all the constituency offices.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. In summation, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Just in case Al is still not clear on the point, this goes across the board, so it's a principle, not something that's going to fluctuate. It was determined by all parties to be fair. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The motion before us: those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you, hon. members.

Again, for the benefit of one or two who might have arrived late, it's been agreed, because of the impact of the meeting of the constitutional committee, that the meeting tomorrow will be held at 11:30 here in the Chamber rather than at the previously announced hour, so you can make your plans accordingly. On the other hand, you might all be a bunch of tremendously efficient people, which you are, with winged heels and we'll be able to get through all of this today.

Right. The next item is one which needs to be dealt with in regard to some various matters the Clerk in his position as deputy minister would like to raise. However, I wonder if members would bear with me so we could take a break until 25 minutes to the hour because of an important phone call I have to make, please. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 2:28 p.m. to 2:38 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, (l) and (g). If we might reconvene with respect to this management discussion. Clerk, do you have any comments, or is there some procedural motion?

MS BARRETT: Which item are we on, sir?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry; we're on item 4(d)(i)E, Management Considerations.
Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if it would be appropriate if we went in camera for this discussion. Therefore, I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Could someone state in sort of general terms, first of all, what this is about so it doesn't arouse suspicions? I mean without going into too much detail.

DR. McNEIL: Yes. It relates to a matter or matters involving one or more specific members that I think it would be better to deal with in camera.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, a further question. Can I ask: does it specifically relate to a matter of confidentiality in the sense that it may relate to an individual, to a personnel file, that type of thing?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is correct.

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, in those types of circumstances I don't have a problem going in camera, as long as it's to protect the confidentiality of an individual.

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

[The committee met in camera from 2:40 p.m. to 3:19 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Where we are on our agenda is item 4(d)(ii)A, Revised Budget Estimates for the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. My understanding is that significant revisions with respect to hosting and travel have occurred, that indeed in nearly all cases if not in all cases, they've followed the lead of this committee and knocked the cost down by 25 percent.

Clerk, are you going to carry this one, please?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, I'll just speak to that briefly. Travel Expenses are now reduced by 26.7 percent and Hosting by 25 percent.

MS BARRETT: Motion approved as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Highlands.

Discussion? Question? All those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously.

This is the revised Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act budget whereby they have again reduced the hosting and travel by 26 point something percent. Thank you. That's the motion. Once again, all those in favour of adopting the revised Heritage Savings Trust Fund budget estimates, please signify. Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

Section B, Standing Committee on Private Bills. Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: Again, this budget has been adjusted to reflect a small reduction in Travel Expenses. Most of the travel there relates to the chairman's vehicle, as well as a reduction of 25 percent in Hosting, and a reduction in Pay to MLAs to reflect this year's actual expenditures.

MS BARRETT: At minus 26.4 percent to the budget, I move we approve.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

MR. McINNIS: I have a question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, indeed, Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: This is a committee that almost always meets while we're in session, and there's an understanding that we don't collect any additional sums for work performed during the session. The revised budget reflects that in reality?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. McINNIS: So the revised estimate, the \$6,000, must be for meetings held outside of session. They must have some that . . .

DR. McNEIL: That was the actual expenditure. Most of that money relates to the actual expenditures this past year.

MR. McINNIS: Why isn't it zero, then, if they never meet outside of session?

DR. McNEIL: Some members do and have claimed. It's not something that is an all-person agreement, if you will. Some do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not all the members do. All may; some do. Thank you. Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: That was my question, Mr. Chairman. I thought the only one that should be on there is the amount the Chairman gets per month for chairing that committee. I know we all have the right to claim, but I thought everyone had decided not to because it meets during session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That, of course, varies from committee to committee and the membership on the committee.

Okay. Motion to approve the revised budget of Private Bills, moved by Edmonton-Highlands. All those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts is next in your budget document, brown tab.

Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: Again, this budget has been changed to reflect the over 25 percent decrease in Travel Expenses, a 30.5 percent decrease, as well as a significant reduction in the pay to members of the Assembly based on this year's experience, with a bottom line of a 30.4 percent reduction.

MS BARRETT: Motion to approve as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Questions?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a call for the question. All those in favour of the revised budget of Public Accounts at minus 30.4, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously.

I now move to page 2 of our agenda, the estimates of the Select Special Committee on Constitutional Reform.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: The committee will not meet officially beyond tomorrow once the report is done, so I think it's safe to assume there will be no additional costs incurred aside from the cost of the printing of the report, which I think we anticipated in here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Any other questions in that regard? This one should be easy enough to move. Would anyone care to move the submitted page? Even though it says zero, we still need to have it show. The Member for Red Deer-North. Thank you.

All those in favour of the approval of that budget, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you, hon. members.

Perhaps we could pause for half a moment to locate Dr. Garrison so we could deal with the next item: Section 13, Visitor Services.

MR. WICKMAN: While we're waiting, Mr. Chairman, could we deal with the three caucus budgets?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It should just be half a moment. Gary is on the way, but in the meantime the Clerk can give you a quick overview, please.

DR. McNEIL: The question was: what would it cost to provide coverage of the teachers' conventions? We just had a small amount of money, and Gary has the detailed information. I've got part of it in my head but not all of it. The additional cost to cover, I think, three or four conventions each year -- so that we would do all the conventions over a three-year period -- is something like \$3,500. We've put that money in the budget to do that in the various categories it would be in, in terms of wages, displays, costs, and so on. It's an approximate \$3,500 cost to provide that coverage, covering a third of the conventions every year so that we would hit all of them in a three-year period.

3:29

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Do I see by the nods of heads that there's general agreement for that to take place?

MR. HYLAND: Do you need a motion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It would be, then, a motion to approve the Visitor Services budget.

MR. HYLAND: I'll move the Visitor Services budget as submitted, including the rotation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Call for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you, hon. members.

Okay, hon. members, the information coming to you now is just germane to our previous motion of approval so that attendance can be made at the various teachers' conventions.

On the agenda items, we go next to caucus budgets. Section 4(d)(iv), Government Members' Office -- Committee. Is there a motion in this regard? The Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I have a motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, do you have a motion with respect to Government Members' Office?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, I have one with respect to the wage component of all three budgets, all three caucuses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The wage component for the total budget?

MR. WICKMAN: Uh huh. Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Edmonton-Whitemud, please.

MR. WICKMAN: My motion would be, Mr. Chairman, that the three caucus budgets be increased to reflect a 3.75 percent increase for the wages for nonmanagement staff within each of the three caucuses.

That corresponds with the increase in the constituency budgets and keeps in line with the increases that were provided for staff outside of caucuses through the various collective bargaining processes.

Now, what percentage of each caucus budget would be classified as nonmanagement wage? Maybe the Clerk would give that to us.

DR. McNEIL: The average over the three caucuses was 75 percent.

MR. WICKMAN: So the increase in effect then relates to an increase of 3.75 percent of 75 percent of each caucus budget.

DR. McNEIL: No. The 3.75 is the increase on the total. The estimate of the average market and merit adjustment plus the increase in benefits costs was 5 percent. So you take 75 percent of 5 percent, and you get 3.75 percent. That's the number we applied to last year's caucus budgets to develop the proposal for this year's caucus budgets.

MR. WICKMAN: That was my understanding too, Mr. Chairman. The only area I went off whack is that the constituency staff component was only increased 3.75 percent rather than the corresponding 5 percent, which I thought may have been inconsistent.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Clerk, and then Taber-Warner.

DR. McNEIL: The constituency office budgets were increased. That \$38,036 was increased by 3.75 percent as well, and that \$38,036 was the total constituency office allowance for this year. So the same principle was applied in both instances.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: I just wanted clarification that the government private members' caucus was using the base figure of 32 members rather than 31. So we are taking the cost per member, which on our last year's budget would work out to \$45,036, and that's being added to the base.

DR. McNEIL: The number that you see in the budget book is based on 31 members, and that averages out to \$45,100 per member. To reflect the fact that you now have an additional member would mean adding an additional \$45,100.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But that will be done.

DR. McNEIL: That number would be \$1,443,204.

MS BARRETT: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, we've got one motion on the floor. I wanted to make a motion related to that, that we've talked over with the other groups, to see that that increase and the one related to the Liberal caucus . . . Can we pass the first one, knowing that the other one is coming to make the corresponding increase in reductions?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Far be it for a poor chairman to have to try to attempt to foresee the future with a group such as this. It would be an interesting challenge. But I'm sure that you've flagged the issue in a sufficient manner. I see nods of approval, so we'll deal with the first motion.

All those in favour of the motion as proposed by Edmonton-Whitemud, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

Cypress-Redcliff, the future is now the present.

3:39

MR. HYLAND: I would like, Mr. Chairman, to move that the Conservative caucus budget be increased by \$45,100 even, the number I have here . . .

I think it was the one David was using.

. . . because of the increase of one member, which should bring our total to \$1,443,204; that the Liberal caucus be reduced by the same amount, \$45,100, because of the loss of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo; but that also starting from the beginning of the fiscal year for every month before the by-election is called and that MLA is in place, they receive one-twelfth of that amount into the caucus every month.

MR. WICKMAN: Could you just add to that element: that after the by-election the remaining portion would go to the appropriate caucus.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's agreeable by all hon. members that all those components are in that one motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Discussion, or a call for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried unanimously. Thank you. The Legislative Assembly Office will be dealing with the administration of the funds as we are at the moment for Calgary-Buffalo. Thank you.

We, therefore, have approval for Section 5: Government Members' Office.

Section 6: Official Opposition.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, did I hear that an additional \$45,000 goes into a special fund for the Reform Party caucus?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think there must be something wrong with your hearing, because the new PA system seems to be working quite well.

Section 6: Official Opposition. Is there a motion with respect to that budget?

MS BARRETT: Sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. HYLAND: I thought Percy's motion was for all three.

MR. BOGLE: That was my understanding as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If that's your understanding of it, fine.

From our notes at the Table we believe, then, that we have dealt with all the items outstanding with respect to the Legislative Assembly budget and also with respect to the individual caucuses.

MR. BOGLE: Well, there are a couple of matters to come back tomorrow, Mr. Chairman. One on postage.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, indeed. We had two motions with regard to that area.

One question to the Member for Taber-Warner in your capacity as chairman of Legislative Offices Committee. I'm sure you have some additional budget information flowing forward to us for inclusion in the whole package, Legislative Assembly estimates.

MR. BOGLE: You mean for the new Ethics Commissioner? The budget was approved on Friday by the Legislative Offices Committee. The budget estimates then will be added to the other three officers' and will become part of our envelope, but it's my understanding that this committee doesn't review the estimates in detail.

MS BARRETT: Does that come under government estimates or what?

MR. BOGLE: Well, it comes under our envelope under Leg. Assembly, if I'm not mistaken. So in addition to the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, and the Chief Electoral Officer, we'll have the Ethics Commissioner.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And then if any questions are raised in the House with respect to Legislative Assembly -- though generally there's been a general agreement about procedure there -- specific questions could go to the chairman of the Legislative Offices Committee with regard to those officers.

MR. BOGLE: I can brief this committee, if you like, that we budgeted for a part-time Ethics Commissioner and one full-time administrative position. It's a senior administrative position at manager III level I believe. We've budgeted for the necessary office supplies. As you know, the space has not yet been finalized. The commissioner and the senior administrator are looking for some space within easy walking distance of the Legislature. That cost will be borne by public works. I don't have the budget with me, but as I recall, we're in the . . . What was your figure, Louise?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: It's \$204,000. I don't have the exact amount.

MR. BOGLE: All right; \$204,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I was asking so that members would be up to date on where it is and the fact we'd be able to draw the documents together so that Treasury can get on to there.

MR. BOGLE: The commissioner's permanent residence is not Edmonton; therefore, there is some travel and subsistence coverage as well.

DR. McNEIL: Which is at the same rate as MLAs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. McINNIS: I'm curious as to why that budget goes under the Assembly, because the Chief Electoral Officer, the Auditor General, the Ombudsman -- the other Leg. officers -- don't go under the Assembly budget.

MR. BOGLE: Well, I think they do fall under our envelope. We as a Members' Services Committee don't deal with them in detail, but they are officers of the Legislature.

DR. McNEIL: The Legislative Assembly budget document will now contain the five elements: the Legislative Assembly Office, this budget that we're dealing with now, plus the other four legislative officers. So there are the five components.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There you have that continuing interesting relationship that all those Leg. officers relate through that committee, but they also have the right of accessing through the office of the Speaker as well.

All right, ladies and gentlemen. I see that perhaps we can move to item 5(a). The Clerk needs to speak to this item and has a proposed Members' Services order for clarification vis-à-vis our relationship with Treasury.

DR. McNEIL: The purpose of this order is to clarify the intent of the administration of the temporary residence allowance versus the capital residence allowance. Treasury is insisting that the way the present capital residence allowance order is written, if the session ends on June 16, let's say, the three-month period for the capital residence allowance starts on the 17th. So we have to calculate everything for three months starting on June 17 to September 17.

What this order does is say that we'll pay the member up till the end of that month on a per diem basis and then the capital residence allowance calculation will come in after that, so that the two allowances, the temporary residence and the capital residence, would be administered in exactly the same way. That's what this order does.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, so there's no change in practice.

DR. McNEIL: There's no change in practice.

MR. HYLAND: We have to do this because of some disagreement somewhere about what we really mean?

DR. McNEIL: We've had some disagreement as to the interpretation of the former order in that the Treasury auditors insist that the way it's presently worded, we should administer it the way I described earlier: if the session ends on the 16th, then we take three months starting on the 17th. It's very difficult to do that with the systems we have in place. It's much easier to administer a complete month.

MR. HYLAND: So what we had was a lawyer that drew up the original order, and now we've got an accountant telling us that what a lawyer said was right is not right; it's wrong.

DR. McNEIL: In essence.

MR. HYLAND: I thought we had trouble with lawyers interpreting law. What are accountants getting into law for too? They've got trouble enough filing your income tax and understanding it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else on this point?

MS BARRETT: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands; sorry.

MS BARRETT: My question relates to subsection (ii): "... and who owns or leases in his name the temporary residence." I'm aware of one MLA who paid half of somebody's rent every month -- just over here -- but the lease was not in the MLA's name; the lease was in the other guy's name. Is that a problem?

DR. McNEIL: We ask for documentation of any sublet situations or agreements so that we have on file the documentation that supports this order.

MS BARRETT: Okay. Thanks.

3:49

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Just to point out that not only does the Legislative Assembly have to be cognizant of the rules and practice of the Auditor General, but then we also have the folks in Treasury trying to interpret it six ways times 11.

Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: You said that it's not a problem. The words "leases in his name" don't necessarily mean you have to have your name on the lease?

DR. McNEIL: As long as we have an agreement that in effect certifies that the individual is making payments for a specific residence, whether it be as a sublessee or renter or whatever.

MR. McINNIS: I got confused when you talked before about the three months. That's three months from the end of session? Maybe if you'd just explain how the system works, it might become clearer.

DR. McNEIL: The way we've been interpreting 2(i): the temporary residence is a hundred dollars per day for a member who's on public or official business and maintains a temporary residence for a period not exceeding 10 days in a partial month or 30 days in any three consecutive calendar months. The situation was that when session ended, they wanted us to calculate the three consecutive calendar months from the date after the session ended. Our practice is to pay for a part month up to the end of that month and then calculate the 30 days in any three-month period starting at the first of the month after the session ended. So it's administratively easier. Whether the person is on temporary residence and not claiming capital residence or is on capital residence, they get the same payment over that period of time. The way that it was being interpreted originally, one person would be paid more than the other.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff, did you want back in on this?

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, has the Auditor General given you -- I forget what they call those letters of notice or whatever telling you to change it? He's supposed to be our senior auditor in this province.

DR. McNEIL: This is not the Auditor General. This is a disbursement control audit report that had some concerns about how we were administering the order, so what we decided to do so that there was no question of interpretation was to clarify it.

MR. HYLAND: But this interpretation has never been raised by the senior auditor in the province, which is the Auditor General?

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is anyone of a mind to move this particular Members' Services order, or do you wish to wait until tomorrow?

MS BARRETT: I'll move it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Edmonton-Highlands. Further discussion?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A call for the question. Those in favour of Members' Services Order 3/92, please signify. Opposed? Carried.

The last item I have here for this afternoon is Plain Language Initiative. Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: As members I believe are aware, the government has adopted a plain language initiative to be applied in the various government departments. It's my recommendation that the Legislative Assembly Office initiate a similar type of initiative. I would recommend that the Editor of *Hansard* be appointed the co-ordinator of the plain language initiative, given his role, and that we are able to liaise with the resource people in the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, who are working on this initiative, and look at a program in terms of how it applies to the Legislative Assembly so that we can continue to ensure that our communications are as clear as possible.

MS BARRETT: Talk about plain language. What do we say now? We want to "initiate" and "liaise." I can't remember the other stuff.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll tell you what. I'm going to give you some plain language: that's information to the committee; the Clerk will now direct *Hansard* to go and do it.

Other Business.

MR. WICKMAN: Can we leave this here until tomorrow then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

On that item was there other business or other things?

MS BARRETT: Yeah. What I was thinking was that I saw under general administration the need to increase or . . . What was it that I saw here? Did we go through our increased premiums for health care, Blue Cross, dental, et cetera, or should we wait until tomorrow?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that item we could deal with tomorrow.

MS BARRETT: Would that be our only one, though? That's what I'm getting at.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have the other item that was there with respect to mailings. Remember we had a two part . . . I gathered there was some discussion and negotiation to take place there on formulas.

MS BARRETT: Oh, okay.

MR. WICKMAN: We can leave that for another three or four months, if you want.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A very generous offer from Edmonton-Whitemud.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, I'd forgotten about that. I thought if we just have another couple of details, let's get it done, but you're right; we have some other stuff to deal with tomorrow.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would think that when we reconvene here tomorrow at 11:30, we should be able to wrap it up certainly within an hour, which would make it easier for people who have to do a lot of traveling.

Cypress-Redcliff?

MR. HYLAND: I move we adjourn until tomorrow morning at 11:30.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

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

[The committee adjourned at 3:54 p.m.]

